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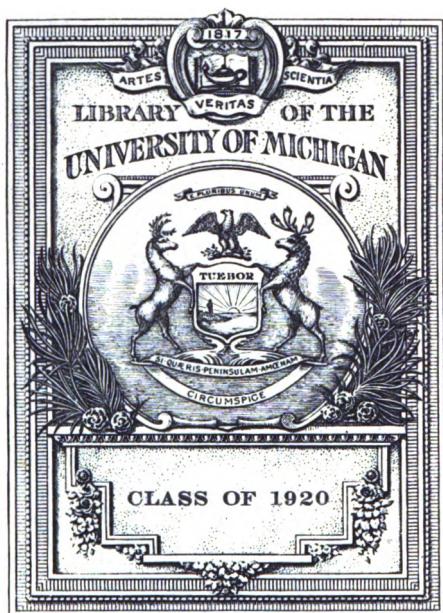


The  
11th Royal Warwicks  
in France  
1915-16

BY  
BREVET-COLONEL C. S. COLLISON, D.S.O.

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**THE 11th ROYAL WARWICKS  
IN FRANCE**









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1915-16

*(From the personal diary of its Commanding Officer)*

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With a Foreword by  
Major-General Lord Edward Gleichen  
K.C.V.O., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.  
Commanding 37th Division, 1915-16

Birmingham  
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39 New Street  
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## FOREWORD.

It is always deeply interesting to read the plain unvarnished diary of a man engaged in stirring work in stirring times. And if, besides the actual day's work, he puts down the thoughts and comments that come into his brain, the result is a document which, whether one agrees with the comments or not, is of strong human and even may be of historical interest. For the student of a hundred years hence will get to know what manner of men they were that fought in the Great War ; and not only how they fought, but what they thought about the while.

We have here the outspoken account of the doings of a battalion-commander and his battalion—a typical English Midland battalion, such as it was my privilege to have under my command, together with twelve other typically English battalions—for there were no Scots, Irish, or Welsh units in the 37th Division. The 11th Royal Warwicks fought and did as well, and, alas, suffered as heavily, under their capable commander as any of my other battalions—and I can give no higher praise than that. It was, indeed, its misfortune that, a few months after Col. Collison gave up his command, this battalion was broken up ; but as the men were distributed to other battalions of the same regiment, they brought with them an access of fighting spirit and discipline worthy to be added to the fine old traditions of the 6th Foot.

It gives an additional fillip to this little book to learn that it is probably the only British one (up till now) in the immense literature of the Great War that recounts the story of the fighting of 1915-16 from the point of view of a battalion-commander. I can only trust that, in spite of the, I fear, somewhat cooling interest in records of the war, it will yet have a large circulation, not only among the Royal Warwicks and their descendants, but amongst the general public, which is already so prone to forget the deeds of those who saved them in the days of the Great Trial.

EDWARD GLEICHEN,

Major-General

(Late Commanding 37th Division).

May 17th, 1928.



## PRELUDE TO MY DIARY IN FRANCE.

I RETIRED from the Regular Army in 1911, and on the outbreak of the Great War was commencing my third year in command of the 5th (Special Reserve) Battalion Middlesex Regiment. These battalions were previously known as the Militia, or "Old Constitutional Force," and as such had taken part as units in former wars, and their rank and file had formed, if not the bulk, at least a very large proportion of the British Infantry at Waterloo. It was not generally understood that they were now to be employed solely as draft-producing units for the Regular Army, and were to have no individual status of their own. Had this been known there would have been a very weak corps of officers available. The latter were largely men of leisure, who had either too much or too little time for regular soldiering, and would not have remained had they realized to what uses their cherished battalions would be put. Even I, who was supposed to know such things, never imagined that in a short time after the outbreak of war I should find myself with only about five officers and thirty other ranks of my original battalion.

The final annual training of the Royal Elthorne Light Infantry (as it used to be called) ended in the last week in July, 1914, when international alarms and excursions were convulsing Europe. The situation appeared so threatening that I suggested by wire that we should remain under arms instead of dispersing; but it was decided that we should disperse, and it was as well that we did, for it gave many the opportunity of seeing their relations for the last time.

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On the 3rd August I was in town and went to the Naval and Military Club, whose members were the temporary hosts of members of my club, "The Rag." Here there was an unusual number of excited officers crowding round the tape, which was tapping out speeches from the House of

Commons about "British interests," "British aloofness," and all the rest of the political twaddle and double-dealing. In spite of, or rather because of, "British interests" war was obviously inevitable, but the fear that our Government would leave others in the lurch led some of the more fiery spirits to consider the advisability of proceeding at once to the French Embassy to offer their services to France. However, we decided to wait another twenty-four hours, and it was enough, for on the night of 3rd-4th August England became at war with the German Empire. On the same night I crossed to Ireland, and on the 5th received the telegram to mobilize. I returned on the following day (6th) and joined my Battalion, which, with the 6th Battalion, was gathering at our headquarters at Mill Hill, London, N.W.

Applicants for commissions were arriving at all hours, and were accepted or rejected in a very short time. I only remember one acceptance that afterwards turned out badly. This was a gentleman of about my own age whom I accepted as a subaltern on the strength of a public school and other recommendations. However, he proved to be a secret drinker, and when told that he must give it up or go, chose the former alternative, with the result that he became so unwell that he had to be invalided out. The doctor told me that the sudden change to temperate habits had been too much for a constitution fed entirely upon alcohol ! Long afterwards I read of his doing in the papers, and the last that I heard of him was that he was in prison. Douglas Story, the War Correspondent, was also an applicant, and I made him a Captain straight away. He had not previously served, but was a man of wide knowledge and military experiences in South Africa, Korea, and Manchuria, and he soon became at home in his new surroundings. He had travelled much and met many celebrated people, and his applications for Staff employment were generally supported by references to "dossiers" (as he called them) in which his abilities were vouched for by most of the potentates of Europe ! He afterwards obtained an appointment in the Quartermaster-General's Department in India, where he died, after doing good work for which he was decorated.

As the days passed, the range and status of applicants for commissions increased proportionately. There were several lawyers, but I think an actuary from Hong Kong was one of my best finds. He was at once placed in my office with the special task of dealing with War Office memorandums involving abstruse calculations, which we, who were concerned with training men for battle, had neither the time, the patience, the inclination, nor the brains to tackle.

Large numbers of the Army Reserve joined us at Mill Hill, bringing up the strength to about 1,100. We spent the night of the 6th (or 7th) at Mill Hill School, and were most hospitably entertained in the empty buildings by the Head Master (Sir John Maclure). The Army Reservist, at this period of his recall, was in most cases a difficult person to deal with. Like all the rest of us he was extremely anxious to get to the front, and duty at home was as irksome to him as it was to us. But, from the way in which he behaved, one would have imagined that he alone had this grievance. The fact really was that he had been away just long enough to lose a large share of his sense of discipline, one might almost say of his intelligence also, for he appeared quite unaware, or at least oblivious, of the fact that he couldn't march or carry his equipment for any length of time without becoming a casualty. No surer testimony of that fact could be seen than the appearance of the roads in rear of the columns retreating from Mons to the Marne. In the South African War (1899-1902) the Reservist had quite a considerable time in which to become disciplined and fit before going into action, and I came across no instances of his being troublesome; but in the early days of the Great War my officers and I had many hot encounters with these gentry, in which, having more power than they had, and being probably a good deal more truculent, we invariably came out on top, to the certain advantage of the Army in general and of the Reservists themselves in particular.

At Chatham, our mobilization station, we formed part of a unit known by the stupid name of "The 1st Thames and Medway Special Reserve Brigade," under Brigadier-General F. D. Lumley, C.B., late of the Middlesex Regiment, an

officer who thoroughly understood the handling and idiosyncrasies of a formation of this sort. The other battalions were the 3rd Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment (Lieutenant Colonel Sir A. Griffith-Boscawen, M.P.), 6th Battalion Middlesex Regiment (Lieutenant-Colonel G. F. Barker), and 3rd Battalion The Queen's Regiment (Lieutenant-Colonel Shaw).

My battalion at first occupied three forts on the southern perimeter of the town, with headquarters and two companies at Fort Horstead, and another two Companies under Major Rooke at Glencoe School, nearer the town. On the outbreak of the war these forts had been manned by local Territorial troops and by flies, the former of whom we relieved on the 7th (or 8th) August. Fort Horstead was packed with explosives of all kinds, and there was a receptacle at the gate to hold pipes, matches, etc., as no smoking was allowed inside. It was a nasty place, and the flies were still in occupation when we left.

Calls for reinforcements began to come in at once and continued regularly and with varying intensity till I left to take command of the 11th Royal Warwickshire Regiment. The trained officers, N.C.O.'s, and men rapidly disappeared. As regards the officers, the system at first in vogue was for the Battalion Commander to make the actual selections, the War Office only calling for so many Majors, Captains, etc., as were required to fill vacancies. This system suited us, as we made our selections carefully, with an eye rather to the rapid and efficient training of the improvised elements from civil life, which were now pouring in, than to the depletion of our most able instructors as reinforcements for France. The War Office held the opposite view. There are points in favour of both. But the point that I held, and still hold, was that the ablest instructors should be retained as long as possible. Nearly all the most proficient were sent to the front in the first few weeks of the war, and a limit had arrived when, in view of the fact that reinforcements were being called for entailing the despatch of men who five or six *weeks* previously had been civilians pure and simple, it was essential that their instructors should be the best that we had. When

these semi-trained elements arrived in France they were pushed straight into the line, and there was no time or opportunity to complete their instruction there. After the first few weeks, when manœuvre had given place to a war of positions, the quality most requisite in an officer at the front was a dogged courage to hold his trench, or mud-bank, to the last. This form of courage was just as conspicuous in the less militarily proficient officers as it was in those whose gift and ability it might be to instruct raw material in the elementary details of their profession. However, the War Office soon took upon *itself* the task of detailing officers by name, only requiring the Battalion Commander to forward periodical lists of those available and not available for reinforcements. To these lists they paid no attention, and as often as not, in fact *more* often than not, marked for reinforcement those officers who had been shown as not available, and vice versa. We countered this by marking for retention those whom we did not wish to retain, and by similar methods of deceit, but it was a disheartening business.

Another obstacle to efficiency was the difficulty of getting hold of the men for training purposes. Here one was up against the unreasoning fear of a German invasion that existed in the minds of responsible people. It was a fear arising from a complete ignorance of German, or of any other, strategy ; but the result was that training was hampered by constant preparations to repel hostile landings. On one occasion a General of high rank having been told (in my presence) that the Infantry Training Manual had chapters dealing with night operations, hurriedly read them up and on either the next day or the day after he asked me if I had any piquets and "Cosack posts" watching the approaches to my "Forts" from the south. I said I had none. Greatly surprised he ordered me to put them out at once, and before long there were clouds of men on outpost duty facing towards the hostile town of Maidstone ! Of course I withdrew them directly he had gone, but valuable time was lost to training and scores of men were left kicking their heels about in country lanes when they should have been preparing for the great battles in France.

Apparently these alarmists never gave more than a passing thought to the Grand Fleet, or, if they did, it was only as a reserve to the Infantry in England. I have still in my possession a "secret" communication to the effect that the "German High Seas Fleet is reported to be out," and that my Battalion was required to exercise "special vigilance" on the occasion! I was not told to get into touch with Admiral Jellicoe, but that was probably an oversight.

Not long after our arrival at Chatham I received private information to the effect that a large number of my recruits was to be taken to form a Battalion of a new Army about to be raised. Most of these recruits were stationed at Gravesend, and I proceeded there at once and made my own selection of reinforcements for the line. The remainder formed part of what was properly called the 1st New Army, but was known to the "man in the street" as "Kitchener's Army." Recruits at this time were of all sorts and conditions, and a more motley lot was never seen, but they were the first to answer the country's call for men and are deserving of all honour. Physically, they were not up to the standard of those that came in later. My own impression is that the recruits of the 3rd New Army were superior to those of the 1st and 2nd Armies.

At first none of these men could be supplied with uniform, shirts, socks, cups and saucers, or in fact anything. I told my Quartermaster to go to London and to order what was required from anyone he liked. Questions of price or of who was to pay didn't engage our attention. I suppose the things *were* paid for, but I never heard. The people who should have paid for them were those who were responsible for the unprepared state of the country; those, in other words, who, when in a position to respond, turned a deaf ear to the repeated warnings of Lord Roberts and his devoted followers in the National Service League.

From Chatham we went to Rochester, and thence, in December, to Chattenden, the area of the Naval magazines. The latter were in an enclosure about three-quarters of a mile in length, surrounded by very high iron railings. Daily from sunset to sunrise, i.e., from 4 p.m. on one day to 8 a.m.

on the next, 300 of my men supplied the guards for the magazines. Tents for each guard were pitched at magazine distance within the enclosure. No fires, lights, or smoking were allowed, and here they shivered in the cold and wet for their fourteen weary hours. Special police from London were also on this duty. All this display of force was quite unnecessary, and a great wastage of good Infantry material. I applied for a reduction of these guards by one half, and carried out the reduction at once.

At the mid-day dinner hour on Christmas Day (1914) a hostile airplane flew over at a moderate height and was smartly engaged by the aircraft batteries. It proceeded up the Thames, dropping a bomb near the village of Cliffe, and shortly returned by the same route. It was reported to have come down off the coast, but I don't know. The shooting of the batteries was excellent and as good as anything I afterwards saw in France, where such events were of daily occurrence. Apart from the fact that the position of the magazines must have been well known to the enemy's intelligence department, it was clearly marked by the light railway line traversing its length and also by the river flanking it. At night its locality was well defined by the lights which were kept burning long after dark by the men employed there. As my headquarters were quite near the main gate I was very personally interested in this matter, but though I referred the light question to the Naval authorities, nothing was done. Fortunately the German was equally careless and nothing was done by him either.

The men were quartered in huts, barns, and sheds. The barns and sheds were not always habitable and the mud was akin to the fifth element in war as recorded by Napoleon in his campaign in Poland. Efforts were made, especially by the Brigadier, to improve their lot by administering to their creature comforts; but stores and such like were hard to get, and the "seal-pattern" way of obtaining them was as lengthy and laborious as it ever was in peace time. Frequent applications for cooking stoves were without result, till the General told me to get them myself. My Quartermaster got them in about two days and about a week later the often



demanding official ones also arrived. I don't know who paid for mine; the bill was sent to me, but I passed it on to the Brigadier.

Whilst in this area we had a detachment of one Company at Kingsnorth, near the mouth of the Medway, as a guard over a naval airship that lived there. Dotted about were several tall wooden erections like rather squat pigeon houses. There was a lot of snipy-looking ground in the neighbourhood which was greatly frequented by wild fowl, and I thought at first that these boxes were for the watchers over a bird sanctuary; but on coming up to them they were seen to be heavily wired round the legs and the hen-coop or box had a couple of holes at each of its four faces, the holes being about 10 feet above the ground. It then appeared that they were to be held by three or four men and were capable of bringing a volume of fire of *two* rifles in any direction! On the receipt of a report as to the inadequate nature of the Kingsnorth defences, the position was visited by several distinguished Naval and engineer officers, and it was decided to increase the number of pigeon-boxes! As a defence by day against javelin men they would have been invaluable, but as there was no likelihood of an attack of this nature, or of any other nature, the matter was of no real consequence. I came across at least one other pigeon-box of similar design near the Naval magazines, so presume that these singular erections were in favour either with the sailors or the sappers or with both, as these two Services controlled this region. However, as they were evidently meant to be held by infantry, the latter should have been consulted as to modern methods in the defence of posts and positions.

It is to be hoped that if ever draft-producing units are required again, that they will be stationed in places less accessible to their homes; but if for some unknown reason this is impossible, then the alternative is to make the offence of absence without leave when on active service in England as serious as it is on the fighting front. It is illogical and absurd, besides unfair and subversive of discipline, to sentence a man to death because he fails to parade with his unit at a "rest" village behind the line, and to sentence his

comrade to a few days detention when he commits an exactly similar offence but sixty or seventy miles further back. Except for the actual mileage there is no difference in the two offences when the Company or party to which the offender belongs is at the time under orders to proceed to the fighting line.

There were very few men at Chatham who could not get home in a very short time, and this was a great temptation to most of them. Whether a man was hours late or days late in returning, the offence necessitated his appearance at Orderly Room, where solid phalanxes of absentees daily paraded. Every absentee required the presence of an N.C.O. to give evidence for the prosecution, with the result that a mass of N.C.O.'s and men were kept hanging about during office hours when they should have been on parade. Of all the vexations and preventable drains on the efficiency of the personnel I can recall none more persistent than this, and it was the same with all the other Battalions of the Brigade—all were composed of men of the Home Counties. With my men of Warwickshire on Salisbury Plain the offence of absence was comparatively negligible, as it was by no means easy to get to that county and back in a short time. Even after my return from France, and actually up to the close of hostilities, illegal absence was nearly as prevalent as ever, and never received the attention that its toll on the efficiency of a Battalion deserved.

The time available for training was as short as it well could be, and to have this inadequate time further encroached upon was lamentable. The strengths of reinforcing drafts, and the frequency with which they were called for, depended of course upon the trend of events in France. During the retreat to the Marne the calls were frequent and urgent, thereafter they moderated for a time, until the autumn fighting round Ypres again intensified them. There were periods in which we were putting men into the firing line with *less than six weeks' service*, and, with the sick and immature, the whole of my original Battalion was absorbed in the battle when the war was still in its early stages.

It was a fortunate matter for the country, and a matter never really realized, that the two most important essentials

for the soldier (after the first three months of the war) were courage and the ability to use his rifle. Had he been required to take the field with the knowledge of his profession and the physical fitness necessary for open warfare, the situation would have been indeed serious ! The very best instructors with the very best type of recruit could never have turned out a proficient infantryman in six weeks. Some years ago the late Colonel Pollock, with everything in favour of his "experiment," as it was called, guaranteed to produce a trained fighter in six *months*. He succeeded, but there were many who thought he was over sanguine, and the "experiment" was closely watched and followed by professional soldiers. What would have been the surprise, not to say consternation, of these people had they been told that in the next war men would have to be trained in a quarter of that time and by improvised instructors ! Nevertheless, and solely because of the two essentials mentioned above, these specimens of our handiwork held the line during the bitter fighting of the autumn and winter of 1914-15. "*Si monumentum requiris circumspice.*"

I have said enough to show that although the main object of our existence was to keep the fighting troops up to strength in trained men there were plenty of other things to distract our attention from that aim, and amongst these the War Office Clerk was always one of the most aggravating and persistent. As time went on and their already swollen ranks were increased by the influx of civilians with their strange commercial jargon, such as "per pro," "of even date," etc., etc., their attentions increased in virulence, and their letters, which nearly always began with "I am to say," and continued with "I am to add," arrived in such quantities that in the last year of the war I had no less than five officers and about thirty N.C.O.'s whose sole duty it was to compete with and endeavour to outwit them. One of their favourite phrases was "The Secretary of State for War will hold you personally responsible" for this or that (once it was if any more men arrived in France without tooth-brushes). For its effectiveness, this phrase depended entirely upon the personality of the War Secretary and visualised an interview

between him and the defaulting officer in respect of the tooth brushes, or whatever they were, and the mystery and terror that were supposed to surround Lord Kitchener gave it a certain weight. But after his untimely death the Clerks themselves realized that the expression had lost its bite and gave it up. It invested no one with more or less responsibility than he had held before, and was purely a stupid type of official bluff.

I once received a congratulatory letter from one of these clerks ; an event of such extraordinary rarity in the life of a soldier that it deserves special mention. Inoculation against typhoid was at this time a purely voluntary operation. No one need undergo it unless he liked, and although it was then, and still is, a crime to poison anyone's food or drink, any officer or soldier was at liberty to poison any or all of his comrades with the germs of typhoid. In the case of the officers I know of no instances in which they objected to the operation ; but amongst the N.C.O.'s and men there were quite a number who did object. The case in favour of inoculation was fully explained to all, and the enormous saving of life based upon the practical experience of its workings in former wars was emphasized by the foremost medical authorities of the day. When, in spite of all this, some men still objected they were brought before me. In no single case did any one of these objectors put forward any sound or reliable evidence in support of his attitude, and generally speaking the interview ended in the man consenting to the operation. In the few cases in which he persisted in his objection I remanded him for medical examination as to his sanity. My view was that a man who regarded his own opinion (on a purely medical question) as of more importance than the opinions of the leading physicians of Europe, and as of more importance, too, than the lives of his comrades, was, charitably speaking, insane. The alternative would have been to arraign him on a charge of being an accessory before the fact in the murder of his comrades. I took the more charitable view, and in the result had so few men not inoculated that, to the amazement of the Brigade, I had the letter of congratulation mentioned above. My own head clerk,

who had spent twenty years of his life in replying to the insults of his contemporaries at Whitehall and elsewhere (and in doing the same, himself, when occasion offered) was so impressed by the letter that he was never quite the same man again !

## PREFACE.

I KEPT daily records of events during my service in France, and sent them home periodically for safe keeping. In 1919 I embodied them in the form now published. They thus retain, to some extent, the atmosphere and bitterness of the war period, and may for that reason be of some interest to the soldier of the future. If they only interest him half as much as I have been interested in reading the reminiscences of officers and soldiers of the past, their publication will not have been in vain. For so long as wars continue the human element will dominate the battlefield, and there is no better way of acquiring a knowledge of that element than by studying the letters and diaries of those who took a personal part in the fighting. No history of a campaign, however good, can supply the atmosphere that is to be found in such records, and no officer who aspires to command men properly can dispense with their study. There will always be something, however small, to be learned from them.

This is, I think, the only publication of an Infantry Battalion Commander's diary that has appeared. So if it has no other distinction, it has that !

I am greatly indebted to Wentworth Huyshe, Esq., for kindly reading through the manuscript and correcting its grammatical errors, and to Captain W. J. Burns Selkirk, M.D., for all the trouble he has taken in arranging for its publication.

C.S.C.



# With the Eleventh Royal Warwicks in France

## CHAPTER I.

Duty at Rochester—I take over Command of 11th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment at Shoreham—Strength of Battalion, March, 1915—Its want of Elementary Training—Move to Ludgershall, Salisbury Plain—The Battalion forms part of the 112th Brigade, 37th Division, 2nd (New) Army.

THE Great War was seven months old when I received telegraphic orders to take over the command of the 11th (Service) Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment. I was then at Rochester with my Reserve Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment, officially known as the 5th Special Reserve Battalion, agreeably to the pre-war commercial custom of labelling as “Special” all commodities, including cigars and tooth paste, designed to attract home markets.

The despatch of reinforcements, with which Reserve Battalions were principally, but by no means entirely, concerned, had by this date assumed some method. The wild enthusiasm that marked the departure of drafts in the early days of the war, with its senseless screams of “Are we down-hearted?” had given way to a more orderly and soldierlike attitude, in keeping with the great task that confronted the nation, but an attitude, nevertheless, no whit less determined, because it was, in comparison, a quiet one.

Having elected to join a Reserve Unit on my retirement from the Army, I might very well have remained with it for the duration of the war but for the kind offices of the Inspector of Infantry,\* in whose Brigade I had formerly served as a Company Commander. It was solely at his instance that I received the call to a more active service.

\*Major-General L. G. Drummond, C.B., M.V.O. (late Scots Guards).



I reached the large and gloomy terminus at Brighton on a murky day in March, and following a drive through a rather mean-looking neighbourhood arrived at "the most respectable hotel" in the town; for so it was called by the Dean, on whose selection I had relied. It was on the sea front, of course, and could not have been more respectable, especially in the matter of its charges.

At this time the 11th Royal Warwickshire was stationed at the large camp of Shoreham, near Brighton, and formed part of the "Army troops" of the 3rd (New) Army, attached to the 24th Division, under Sir John Ramsay. The Battalion was raised in October, 1914, so that on my arrival it was about five months old. The Adjutant, Captain J. Falvey-Beyts, met me at the hotel, and it was from him that I learnt these details. It had a strength of about 1,000, with a formidable corps of nearly 100 officers. A few of these had previous service in the Regular Army, or had served in the late South African War with irregular troops; but as a whole both officers and other ranks were fresh from civil life. I found that the Battalion had taken part in either Brigade or Divisional tactical exercises (!), that all ranks were exceptionally keen, and that the physique of the rank and file was generally excellent.\*

On the principle of teaching a child to walk before he can run, I started training from the very beginning, i.e., "First position of a soldier," "Right-hand salute," etc. The months during which the battalion had been under arms, combined with the keenness and aptitude of the officers and men, enabled this groundwork of their training to be pushed forward with unusual rapidity. It is not actually correct to say that the Battalion had been previously "under arms" at all, as very few men had rifles, they were mostly dressed in blue and had hardly any equipment; but with all these drawbacks (not the least of which was the presence of 100 officers nearly ninety per cent. of whom had not the foggiest idea what to do, or how to do it), the universal desire to learn was so noticeable and enthusiastic that the tasks and responsibilities of my instructorship were immensely lessened.

\*See Note (a) at end of chapter.

Training had lasted about a month when the Battalion was ordered to Ludgershall, Salisbury Plain. There the 37th Division, under Major-General Count (later Lord Edward) Gleichen, was in process of formation as part of the 2nd (New) Army, and the 11th Royal Warwickshire joined the 112th Brigade, under Brigadier-General J. Marriott, D.S.O., M.V.O., the other Battalions being the 6th Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment, 8th Battalion East Lancashire Regiment, and 10th Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. As regards clothing, equipment, and rifles we were still in a noticeably backward condition in comparison with the remainder of the infantry of the Division; but these matters were now pushed on energetically, and by the end of May we were practically complete. Tactical instruction in the field, concluding with Divisional operations, put the finishing touch to the training, and on the 25th June, 1915, the Division was reviewed by the King preparatory to embarkation for the seat of war.\* The four months training that the Battalion had had was all too short. About a month after its arrival at Ludgershall, when it had not completed its instruction under the Company Commanders, or had even started Battalion training, it was called upon to take part in Brigade exercises. That it acquitted itself so well at this and at Divisional training was due both to the efficient work of the Company Officers and to the great keenness and determination to make good of the N.C.O.'s and men.

\*At this review mounted officers were directed to be dressed like the men and to carry full packs. The disorderly appearance of a mounted officer on a mettlesome steed, barging about the country with a heavy load bumping about on his back, was not to be contemplated, so my servant (Bowden), an old soldier, overcame the difficulty by packing mine with straw and a few copies of the "Northcliffe Press," and it was greatly admired for its symmetry.

Note (a).—The fact that the Battalion had taken part in Divisional exercises before my arrival, and was at the same time so ignorant of both sectional and company training that I had no alternative but to start elementary instruction from the very beginning, is an instance of the entire want of method that obtained in the training of some units of the New Army.

Officers without the faintest idea of how to train men, and often as ignorant of their work as the people they were supposed to teach, were occasionally put in command of these battalions, with deplorable results.

## CHAPTER II.

Embarkation at Folkestone for Boulogne—Billeted at Zutkerque in French-Flanders—Strength in August, 1915—March to Hazebrouck via Arques—Half-Battalion moves to Locre in Flanders, where it comes under fire for the first time—Abolition of the Horrible Cap and the “Charlie Chaplin” Moustache—British Army Fashions.

FROM now on I take up the story from the diary that I kept from this date—30th July, 1915. On that day, very early in the morning, at 1-30 a.m. to be exact, the transport under Second-Lieutenant E. H. Davie, the Machine Gun Detachment (two guns) under Second-Lieutenant A. H. Bowden, and some signallers, the whole under the command of Major C. P. Rooke, entrained at Ludgershall for the front. Over seventy animals (including a large number of mules) formed part of this detachment; in spite of which the entrainment only occupied forty-two minutes. We were informed that this advance party would proceed via Havre, and that we should not see it again for about thirty-six hours.

At 3-30 p.m. on the 31st July, Battalion Headquarters, with the right-half Battalion, entrained at Ludgershall. The Brigadier-General and Brigade-Major (Captain Pollok-Morris, Highland Light Infantry) and the Chaplain, Rev. Horace Sturt, travelled in the same train. The left-half Battalion, under Major A. M. Jones, followed at 4-30 p.m. Both trains reached Folkestone at about 8-30 p.m., when the Regiment embarked on the transport, which sailed at 9-45 p.m. escorted by a destroyer. Boulogne was reached at 11 p.m., where, following some discussion with a raucous-voiced individual with a megaphone, the Battalion disembarked and marched to the Camp at Ostrohave, on the heights,

about two miles south of the town. The "marching in" strength was twenty-six officers and 873 other ranks.\*

At 10-30 a.m. on the 1st August the Battalion moved to Pont de Brique, famous as the headquarters of Napoleon at the time of his contemplated invasion of England. Here it was met by the detachment under Rooke, whose train it joined, and after a three-hour journey arrived at Audruicq at 3-30 p.m. (see sketch 1). A march of about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles brought us to Zutkerque, and it was during a halt on this march that the first faint muttering of the guns was heard from the north-east. The country appeared flat and uninteresting, and the heat was severe. The Companies were billeted in and around the village, which was a pleasant and picturesque little place, boasting quite a fair show of well-grown timber. Battalion headquarters was at the Château Cabour. The strength of the Battalion was now thirty officers and 960 other ranks. Brigade Headquarters was at Nielles-les-Ardres, a pretty village about three miles away.†

At midnight on the 3rd August orders were received for the Brigade to move to Arques via Nordausques—Tilques—St. Martin-au-Laert, a distance of fourteen miles†. It was very hot and dusty, and a halt of two hours was made at Tilques; the large, though unattractive town of Arques being

\*The 37th Division was the ninth of the thirty New Army divisions to land in France, the order of precedence being as follows :

Division.	Date of landing in 1915.	Division.	Date of landing in 1915.
(1) 9th	9th May.	(6) 19th	16th July.
(2) 14th	18th May	(7) 20th	20th July.
(3) 12th	29th May.	(8) 18th	24th July.
(4) 15th	7th July.	(9) 37th	28th July.
(5) 17th	12th July.		

N.B.—After the landing of the 37th Division there was about a month's pause before fresh contingents began arriving, beginning with the 23rd Division on the 25th August.

†Sketch 1.

reached at 5 p.m. Here the men were billeted in barns and outhouses along the extensive Rue d'Aire.

At 7 a.m. on the following day (5th) the march was resumed, Hazebrouck being reached at 2 p.m.\* The heat and dust, combined with the "pave" roads and the rather frequent checks in the long divisional column, made this march particularly trying, and there were many casualties by the way. The number of men who fell out on the march was twenty-five, and the Brigadier recorded his pleasure with the appearance of the Battalion as it marched in.

At Hazebrouck the Battalion, with the 8th Battalion East Lancashire Regiment, occupied a disused, extensive, reasonably dirty, and partly built hospital in the north-eastern outskirts of the town. Some of the officers lived in erections of their own in the open spaces that the buildings enclosed, others were billeted in the vicinity. Occasional badly-aimed bombs had been dropped by German airmen, mostly in the neighbourhood of the station, but the town was otherwise untouched and appeared to be in a prosperous condition, the cafés in the large square by the Mairie being well patronized every afternoon and evening. The other two Battalions of the Brigade were billeted in villages south of Hazebrouck, the 110th Brigade was at St. Sylvestre, the 111th at Eecke, Divisional Headquarters at Caestre.\*

On the 8th August the Battalion, with the 8th Battalion East Lancashire Regiment, was inspected by General Sir H. Plumer, commanding 2nd Army.

On the 9th my diary records, "Heavy firing was heard at about 2 a.m. this morning. This was the artillery preparation before the successful attack of the 6th Division in its recapture of the trenches lately lost at Hooze under a surprise attack accompanied by liquid fire." I believe this was the first occasion of the use of liquid fire against the British.

On the 10th August Rooke, with "A" and "C" Companies, a platoon each from "B" and "D," half the 1st Line Transport, two Cookers, and some Signallers, marched at 7 a.m. for digging work near the front line about Locre (Headquarters, 28th Division). The route was via Strazeele

\*Sketch 1.

and Bailleul, the distance about thirteen miles, and the day extremely hot. The march discipline of the detachment was very good. Parties of equal strength from the other Battalions of the Brigade accompanied it. On the evening of the arrival of the detachment at camp the German artillery put two shells in close proximity to it. This thoughtful attention was received with cheers by the men. It was, to most of them, their baptism of fire, and their pleasure and excitement were natural. The novelty, however, soon wears off; but it must be said that under the heavy bombardments to which they were subsequently subjected, their spirit always remained firm and trustworthy, and their bearing correct and soldier-like, and though there might be no cheering there was never a hint at unsteadiness, however severe the ordeal.

I omitted to mention that on the eve of embarkation for the front a detachment of about 200 N.C.O.'s and men joined the Battalion from the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion. These men had previously served in France and Flanders with the Line Battalions, whence they had been evacuated to England on account of either wounds or sickness. They formed a notable addition to our strength, and it is only right to record that their previous knowledge of conditions on this front, and their wholehearted spirit of camaraderie, had much to do with the readiness and battle-efficiency of the Battalion.

The fitful shelling to which this wing of the Battalion was exposed was certain, sooner or later, to claim a victim, and on the 20th August, No. 8744 Private Richards of "C" Company was severely wounded. This was the first casualty sustained by the Battalion in the war.

On the 13th August I had ridden with Colonel Melville, 8th East Lancashire, to visit Rooke's detachment. The number of civilians living in close proximity to the front line (we came across a heavy and morose-looking individual whose fastness was on the dominating slopes of Mont Kemmel itself!) struck us as altogether extraordinary, and it is not to be wondered at that there was much talk about spies. I saw one man calmly ploughing whilst shells from both sides were passing over his head.

During the absence of this detachment from Hazebrouck

the other wing of the Battalion concerned itself with musketry, marching, and other training, a Brigade rifle range being constructed at the Bois de Huit by Captain E. L. Routh, at a cost of ten francs fifteen centimes !

Rumours as to a probable move were daily assuming a more contradictory and intense nature, till on the 23rd orders were received of "probable move to Gødewaersvelde to-morrow. Train on Wednesday." This proved to be correct. The strength of the Battalion was now 1,050, reinforcements having arrived from the 12th and 13th Battalions.\*

I cannot close this chapter without a reference to the question of the headgear of the Army at this time as it was at Hazebrouck that the matter assumed an acute form. The advent of position warfare had caused Infantrymen to bring to notice the fact that the regular outline of their cap, when silhouetted against the sky-line, or the rugged parados of the trench, greatly helped the German marksmen in their selection of a target and that it was the cause of unnecessarily large casualties to themselves. This fact was recognized and directions were given that the stiffening round the brim of the cap should be removed. So far, so good. But the concession was taken up by the non-fighting elements of the Army with tremendous fervour, and in place of the Infantryman altering his hat to suit battle conditions, it was left to the before-mentioned elements to initiate a type of hat which for slovenliness and ugliness has never been surpassed ; consequently at the time I write of, the hat was worn with the rim crushed flat, and with the heavy bulging sack-like projection hanging over the back of the neck. The non-fighters, too, usually wore it at the back of their heads !

However, by the well-disciplined Infantryman these monstrosities were never really adopted ; they remained throughout the war the special perquisite, or sign, of the non-combatant.

The case of the officers was as bad. The weekly picture papers and hatters of all descriptions between them evolved a hat which was a cross between that usually to be seen on

\*Curiously enough the 13th Battalion was commanded by my wife's father, Colonel J. Grove White, C.M.G.

the heads of Breton onion-sellers and a mufti cap after being worried by a bull-pup and then thrown into a pond. But it was actually like nothing on earth except itself. However, the disease, like the so-called Charlie Chaplin moustache (which, in fact, had all the appearance of a disease of the nose) was beginning to get such a hold on the officers that its suppression was decided upon, and the "Bystander" or "Breton onion-seller's" hat was abolished in the Battalion by an order published at Hazebrouck in August, and although it was allowed in the trenches, it was never seen again elsewhere. A Divisional Order abolished the "Charlie Chaplin" moustache shortly afterwards.

There is nothing original in this bizarre habit of dress on active service. Grattan, in his "Adventures with the Connaught Rangers," says that "scarcely any two officers were dressed alike," and that provided they brought their men into the field "well-appointed and with sixty rounds of good ammunition," Lord Wellington didn't care what the officers wore. "Quantities of hair," he says, "a pair of moustachios, and screw brass spurs were essential to a first-rate 'Count'—for so were our dandies designated."

In the Crimea, too, there are amusing stores of how such "Counts" sometimes got into trouble by dressing up to represent our Allies the French. However, in those days the British Army was entirely a professional one, and some laxity was permissible and even essential in view of the heavy wear and tear of clothing, and of the impossibility of getting it replaced; but it would never have done to have countenanced such habits in the young, growing Armies of our day. Moreover, there was never the least reason for them.



### CHAPTER III.

We concentrate at Gödewaersvelde—Entrain for Doullens, and billet at Amplier—Attached to 48th Division, at Hébuterne, for instruction in Trench Warfare—Minenwerfer—Visit by Labour M.P.'s—March to Humbercamps, via St. Amand.

THE headquarter wings of the battalions of the 112th Brigade left Hazebrouck on the 24th August in two columns. The first, composed of the 8th East Lancashire and ourselves, marched at 1-30 p.m. via La Brearde and Caestre, arriving at Gödewaersvelde\* at 4-30 p.m. The wing, under Rooke, from Dranoutre marched in at 6 p.m.

Gödewaersvelde lies in a valley north-west of the conspicuous feature of the Mont des Cats, the summit of which is crowned by a monastery, and commands an extensive view in all directions. It was just east of this hill that the shattered legions of the German were brought to a standstill after their determined effort to break the front in the spring of 1918. Near the monastery itself lay the graves of several of our Indian soldiers, who had fallen there in the early days of the war. Just below the crest is the hamlet of Kruystraete, and here and along the road, called the Rue du Mont des Cats, the Battalion was bivouacked for the night.

At 6-30 p.m. on the following day it entrained for Doullens in two parties, twenty-five officers and 890 other ranks in one train, three officers and 100 other ranks, with the transport, in another. No lights were allowed during the journey, and the men were undoubtedly relieved when they arrived at their destination at 2 a.m. on the 26th. Seven hours of open cattle-trucks and horse-vans was more novel than interesting to most of them. At Doullens Station some English ladies kindly supplied them with hot cocoa, after which the journey was continued by march route to Amplier\*, a village on the

\*etch 1.

River Authie, which was reached at 4-30 a.m. The scenery here was a welcome change after the flat plains of French Flanders ; the inhabitants were all very friendly, and everyone was pleased at the thought of taking over a portion of the French front, where the outlook, both artistically and otherwise, appeared much more interesting.

It was said that the Division would take up the line Fonquevillers—Berles-au-bois in relief of the French ; but that the Infantry was first to be attached, for instruction in trench-warfare, to units of other Divisions already in line about here. The East Lancashire and North Lancashire Battalions were accordingly sent to the 4th Division, whilst we were attached to the 48th (Territorial) Division, which was entrenched about Hébuterne. The 6th Bedfordshire remained temporarily unattached.

At 7 a.m. on the 27th August the Battalion left Amplier, reaching Coigneux at 10 a.m. Here it halted till 6-30 p.m., when the march was resumed, Sailly-au-bois being reached just as night fell. Guides from the 1st Bucks and 4th Berkshire Territorials met us here, and conducted the different companies, by platoons, to their several positions in reserve in the village of Hébuterne.\*

These attachments to other Battalions were very necessary in view of the difficulties incidental to the complicated system of position warfare then in force. The maze of trenches, positions of dug-outs, depôts of stores, ammunition, wire, etc., etc. ; the orders in case of hostile attacks, the movements of the counter-attacking troops ; arrangements for patrolling, and the countless minor, but all-important, adjuncts to the defensive system, all required close study, and the week spent at Hébuterne was well spent.

Although there were many quite habitable houses, the village was largely in ruins. The church had, of course, suffered severely ; that quality of the mind which the German called "Kultur" always called for the destruction of churches, hospitals, and the like. Only the crucifix in the churchyard had so far escaped demolition. The wonderful immunity of these religious tokens was one of the most

\*Sketch 1.

noticeable features in hundreds of front-line villages. The battle-line itself skirted the eastern border of the village, and was separated from the enemy's line at distances varying from 250 to 800 yards. Just north of Hébuterne the British line touched the French, who continued it up to and beyond Arras.\* Their artillery was always very aggressive if called upon by their own, or by our, Infantry to reply to the Boche gunners, whom it promptly smothered with rapid salvoes from its seventy-fives.

It was at Hébuterne that we first saw that most interesting spectacle a duel in the air. Other happenings, as the months rolled on, became either stale, uninteresting, or unpleasant, in a greater or less degree, but I never yet met the man for whom the doings of the airmen had not a constant fascination, no matter how long he had been at the front, or how often he had watched them at their work.

On the night 2nd-3rd September the Companies held the front line for the first time as complete units in the final course of their instruction in trench warfare. The assistance that they had received from all ranks of the 1st Bucks, 4th Berkshire, and 5th Gloucester Battalions of the 48th Division will always be gratefully remembered. Previous to our arrival at Hébuterne we had not come into direct contact with first line Infantry units in the field, and the impression of smartness and discipline that these Territorial Battalions gave was most noticeable; no Division that I saw in France produced N.C.O.'s and men that bore themselves in a more correct and soldierlike manner.

Headquarters at Hébuterne were in a respectable little house about 200 yards behind the line. The ominous scream of an advancing shell occasionally interrupted us at our meals, and when the screams became more insistent the whole party, after looking at each other in a foolish manner, usually took to the cellar in a confused mass. Everyone seemed to think that someone else should be the first to move, though everyone seemed quite happy in the dirty cellar when he got there!

\*Sketch 3.

On the day that our companies first held the line as units, we were disturbed by very heavy and nasty-sounding explosions of a tearing and rending type, a little to the north of us. It appeared that Warwickshire Territorials had relieved the French on our left, and that these noises were caused by the German bursting a succession of aerial torpedoes, or minenwerfer, on their trenches. Later on, our men had personal experience of these engines of destruction, which blew great gaps in the line, and were generally of a most offensive nature. The deafening crash of their explosion could always be distinguished, even during an intense bombardment from guns of all descriptions.

Some Labour Members of Parliament arrived on a visit whilst we were at Hébuterne. These corresponded to the "T.G.'s," or Travelling Gents., of the Crimean Days and, as in those days, the officers detailed to conduct them often had amusing tales to tell of their tours of the trenches. As a rule their itinerary along the line was marked at intervals by the appearance over the parapet of a forest of periscopes, and this unusual display led more than once to a reciprocal interest (in the shape of a shell) on the part of the German, and to a consequent desire on the part of the touring party to visit the dug-outs! The facetious remarks generally passed by the soldiery at their expense were as often as not unmerited; I fancy they meant well enough.

At 7 p.m., 4th September, the Battalion left Hébuterne, passing along the "unhealthy" road to Sailly-au-Bois in columns of platoons at 200 yards distance. After concentrating west of Sailly it continued its night march via Souastre to St. Amand\*, which we were soon to know so well; there it bivouacked for the night in an orchard. The village was occupied by several batteries of French Artillery, but these departed in the early morning of the 5th, and shortly afterwards the Battalion left for Humbercamps\*, where it went into billets.

\*Sketch 1.

## CHAPTER IV.

Conferences at Humbercamps—The “Nasty Job” at Berles-au-Bois—  
It continues for Three Nights—The Corps Line—Robinson  
relieves Marriott in command of the Brigade.

HUMBERCAMPS was a pretty village, and like all its kind in this part of the country was well timbered. The men were billeted in barns and out-houses, the officers in various rooms. These rooms provided, between them, four beds for the twenty-nine officers. However, they did provide shelter, which was the principal consideration. The Lancashire Battalions were at Souastre, and the Bedfordshire was learning trench warfare somewhere else, but was due to join us at Humbercamps afterwards.

Here, on the 6th, I held a conference with the officers on the experiences of our stay at Hébuterne, and a comprehensive scheme of work was drawn up, based upon the lessons that we had learned there. As time went on, and as the result of our further experiences in the line, we added to this scheme, until we eventually had a working basis that required little if any outside help to make it applicable to all the multifarious details of trench-warfare. Later on our “Log-Book” of work done in the trenches was practically adopted intact by the Division. At these conferences officers were encouraged to give their opinions on all matters within their knowledge and experience, and nothing was conclusively decided upon until it had been properly sifted, it being realized that inattention to what might seem a minor detail of principle might easily lead to consequences affecting the lives of many men.

On the 7th September my Diary records that the betting on the Stock Exchange was four to one on the war ending next month !—Only three years out !

At 2-45 p.m. on the 8th we moved to Berles-au-Bois,\* on the front of the 110th (Leicester) Brigade, for work on their sector. Their Brigadier informed me that it was a "nasty job." And so it was. Berles-au-Bois, a fine village on commanding ground, was about three-quarters of a mile from the front trenches, and was one of the "rest" villages of the 110th Brigade, though its northern end was in occupation of French troops, whose line here marched with that of the 37th Division. The village was at this time in good condition and little damaged by shell fire. Nevertheless, it was by no means immune; occasional shells pattered about it, two or three once landing in the middle of an open-air concert party given by the Divisional band.

The "nasty job" was the construction of a communication trench from the front line, over a slight rise in the ground to a hollow or ravine in rear; a distance of about 300 yards, the "nasty" part being that portion of the proposed trench which followed the rise and which in day time was in full view from the enemy's position. The trench had been previously taped out by Lieutenant Notage, R.E. (New Army), a capable and resourceful officer, and at 8-15 p.m. a party of 570 officers and men, led by him, stumbled its way down the long communication trench leading from the village to the scene of action. The Officer Commanding 6th Leicestershire, then holding this part of the line, had arranged to keep up a desultory fire with the double purpose of drowning the noise made by our working party and of distracting the attention of the German from it; so it was to the accompaniment of a certain liveliness that our people crawled out of the front line and ranged themselves in the dark along the tape. Here they set to work with great keenness and rapidity, interrupted at intervals by the German flares that necessitated everyone lying flat whilst the light lasted. Bullets sang and whined through the air as the enemy replied to the fire of the Leicester men, so I arranged with their Colonel that, on the next occasion, we should try the effect of doing without this émeute, and let the holders of the line act as if there were

\*Sketch 1.

not 500 Warwickshire men digging and delving in the open behind them. This he did, with satisfactory results. When work ceased just before 3 a.m. (9th September) good progress had been made and many of the workers were safely under ground. What seemed really extraordinary was that there were no casualties in face of quite a respectable waste of ammunition on the part of the German. But the German is no marksman; he specializes in snipers and machine-gun experts and in all other horrid and fancy ways in the matter of murder and killing, but his infantry as a whole is what he calls cannon-fodder and nothing else. Dawn was breaking as we arrived back at Berles, and all ranks were soon resting in their billets. It was their first experience of an operation of this sort, and it was jumpy work, and work that required to be quickly and very quietly performed, and which owing to the darkness could not be sufficiently supervised by the officers in charge of it, with the result that it depended for its success on the individual soldier; and very thoroughly was confidence in him justified on that night.

On the following night a party of similar strength was engaged in the preparation of "feathers," or "slits," in an already existing communication trench. These slits were narrow and deep excavations about twenty yards in length constructed at intervals and at right angles to the existing communication trench. They were designed to accommodate troops assembling prior to an assault, and, like the trench begun on the preceding night, were made in preparation for the Franco-British attack north and south of Arras on the 25th, known later to the world as the Battle of Loos. The careful preliminary arrangements made by the Adjutant, a few selected officers, and the Engineer-Officer, enabled the placing in the dark of each separate party of eighteen men to be accomplished without noise, delay, or confusion, an achievement of no small credit when it is remembered that each party of eighteen had to climb out of a trench about 7-ft. in depth, first on one side, then on the other, and in darkness only occasionally relieved by the hostile flares. As on the previous night, there were no casualties from the enemy's fire, though several men had narrow escapes, and

two were injured through being mistaken by their comrades for rocks !

On the night 10th-11th, two Companies continued the preparation of the trench begun on the first night, and the other two continued on the "slits" of the previous night. There were again no casualties. Every night, fortunately, had been uniformly fine and moonless, and the front was quiet, though up north, about Arras, the sky was in a continual flicker of light and the air heavy with the rumbling of guns—omens of what was to come.

Although it had been notified that we were to be relieved on the 11th, it was really beginning to appear that we were becoming a Pioneer Battalion to the enterprising Commander of the 110th Brigade, who, with the French Divisional General on our left, had been most polite in his attentions. Consequently the next night found us again at these trenches, although advance parties of one officer and four N.C.O.'s per Company had returned to Humbercamps in preparation for a reconnaissance of the line east of Bienvillers-au-Bois, which we were shortly to occupy. The work was completed without further incident, and at 5-30 p.m. on the 12th, on a beautiful autumnal evening, the Battalion returned to Humbercamps with no regrets at all for its departure from the friendly neighbourhood of the Leicestershire men.

For the few remaining days at Humbercamps the men were mostly employed, in large parties of 200 to 400 strong, in work upon what was called "the Corps Line." This was a system of entrenched works, called by the French "points d'appui," constructed behind the line of Divisional entrenchments and intended to bar the way to the enemy should he succeed in forcing the front. This type of work was usually referred to by our people with a certain amount of mystery and awe, as if it had originated in the brain of some great soldier of our day, although it had been successfully employed by Maréchal Saxe in the war of the Austrian Succession. By us these works were commonly called "strong points"; but when constructed, as I have seen them, of chalky soil and quite near to the front line, they better merited the name of "death-traps," for they were nothing else. I was told that



this special "Corps Line," on which thousands of men worked for thousands of hours, eventually collapsed, but I had no opportunity of verifying the report.

On the 14th September Brigadier-General Marriott was invalided to England, much to the regret of the Battalion, in which he had always taken the liveliest interest, and which he thanked before his departure for the "splendid support" that it had always accorded him. He was succeeded in the Command of the Brigade by Lieutenant-Colonel P. M. Robinson, C.M.G. (a 50th officer). Captain Pollok-Morris was invalided at about the same time, and Captain Hon. E. Stourton, Yorkshire Light Infantry, succeeded him as Brigade-Major.





## CHAPTER V.

Occupy the Hannescamps Sector in Relief of 13th Battalion Royal Fusiliers—Battle-order of the Battalion—Hannescamps and its Defences—British and German Defensive Measures—The Front and Communication Trenches—The German Positions—Information—Excellent Health of the Battalion.

At 8-30 p.m., 15th September, the Companies, marching by platoons, at distances of 200 yards, left Humbercamps and proceeded via Pommier and Bienvillers-au-Bois (Brigade Headquarters) to Hannescamps\*, where it relieved the 13th Battalion Royal Fusiliers, 111th Brigade, the latter having relieved the French in this sector about ten days ago. The night was extremely dark, and the darkness was accentuated by a slight drizzling rain, which made progress through the communication trenches rather slippery—the trenches were not boarded at this period. The relief was completed at midnight, which was three and a half hours from the time of leaving Humbercamps and very creditable to both battalions. The relief arrangements were always made by the Battalion occupying the trenches. In the Appendix will be found a copy of orders dealing with a winter relief, from which it will be seen with what care such arrangements had to be made to obviate the congestion of the in-going and out-going platoons in the narrow communication trenches, and naturally there were many similar arrangements that required equally careful provision.

Two Companies occupied the front line, one Company was in reserve in the village, and one Company formed the garrison for the defence of the village line. After six days, the two front-line Companies and the two supporting Companies exchanged duties, and after twelve days in the trenches the Battalion went into Divisional reserve for a further twelve days, and so on. The time spent in Divisional reserve

\*Sketch 2.

was called the "rest period," but most people preferred to call it the "out-of-trench period," as being a more accurate description of the time spent there.

Although the village of Hannescamps\* was in ruins, there was one quite habitable house that was used as a Headquarters mess, and one smaller building that was occupied as a Regimental Dressing Station by one of the Battalions; and at its north-west entrance stood a draughty-looking building of which the machine gunners took possession. A few other semi-dismantled houses were at first occupied, but one by one they were reduced by shell-fire or became otherwise uninhabitable. But as a general rule the village itself was not an "unhealthy" spot, and every evening after dark the Battalion transport with provisions and the post clattered down from Humbercamps or St. Amand (or wherever it happened to be) making a prodigious din, which could be heard for miles around, and though the German sometimes shelled the street and the road leading from Bienvillers, and more than once with loss to our transport, yet he understood that we could do the same to him (as we did), and he generally desisted.

The *lisière*, or border, of the village had been prepared by the French for defence. In case of attack it was held by the Garrison Company before-mentioned, reinforced by troops from the Brigade reserve at Bienvillers. Fortunately no serious attack was ever made against this sector. I say fortunately, because we had quite enough to do to keep the front and communication trenches defensible and passable, and had no men to spare for improvements to, or even for the maintenance of, the village line; with the result that it presented generally a deplorable appearance, and was only properly appreciated by the rats. Moreover, it was a matter of opinion whether the reserve at Bienvillers could ever have reached it in time to take part in its defence.

I was then, and am still, convinced that the British system of defence, as then adopted, was most unsuitable. Instead of the front line being lightly held, and formations distributed in depth, the exact reverse was the case, and the supporting

\*Sketch 2.

portions of front-line Battalions were so close to the troops that they supported that in case of attack both must inevitably have been overwhelmed, or at least committed to action, at the same time ; in either case a most undesirable result. Under this system, once battle was joined, it was impossible for either the Battalion or Brigade-Commander to influence it effectively ; their main forces, instead of being held in hand, would have been automatically involved in the action from the outset. It was, in short, the negation of all offensive action. "No line whatever lends itself for defence, unless it also possesses capabilities for offence," said Napoleon ; but arguments in favour of "defence in depth," as it was called, were usually met by remarks such as "My dear fellow, British troops always hold their trenches to the last," or, "It did very well at Ypres !" with other equally futile and irrelevant observations ; and it was not until long afterwards that the British and German armies were forced to adopt more elastic and up-to-date methods.\*

The plan (Sketch 5) shows the general lie of the trenches at Hannescamps. The front of the Battalion was roughly 1,200 yards. At nightfall the Reserve Company reinforced the front by sending a platoon each to the Lille Road and Lens Road support trenches ; this left half a Company at my disposal to meet eventualities !

It will be seen that the village of Hannescamps lay in rear of the right of the Battalion, consequently had the Hannescamps sector been the objective of a hostile attack from the east, the movements of reinforcements from the Battalion Reserve to any portion of the support line would have been exposed at once to flank attack. Battalion Headquarters was still further echeloned to the right rear, though its "battle centre" was at the northern outskirts of the village, where the main communication trench (Lulu Lane) joined the Hannescamps—Monchy Road. The French had made this

\*In a "Secret" Memorandum, issued by German Army Headquarters, dated 1st August, 1915, and entitled "Essential Principles for the Defence of Positions, etc.," paragraph 1 states : "The fundamental principle is that the *first* line must be held at all costs." However, as a result of the British gun-fire in the Battles of the Somme the Germans were quickly compelled to abolish this "fundamental principle."

communication trench, in the stress of battle, alongside the road, and so it remained. There was an alternative one, called Left Avenue, on the north side of the road, but it was not possible to maintain it in repair, and it eventually fell upon evil days. For the time, then, that the Battalion occupied this front, its communications were of a decidedly unpleasant and lopsided character. Nevertheless the advent of rainy weather and the snows of winter caused such havoc in the long front line that neither men nor material were available for other work than its bare upkeep and for the provision and maintenance of dug-outs in it, so the best had to be made of the communications as they already existed.

The right and left sections of the line were held alternatively by "A" and "B" Companies and "C" and "D" Companies respectively, the extreme right being as far as 600 yards from the enemy's front trench, whereas this distance was lessened to about 200 yards in the section held by the left-half Battalion, sap-heads thrust out as listening posts further reducing it, here and there, to 150 yards. The proximity of this flank to the enemy caused it to experience the frequent attentions of his trench-mortars and minenwerfer, whereas on the right our men were, by comparison, little disturbed in that way. The wide expanse of no-man's land was extensively used by our patrols, which soon gained a reputation for daring and successful reconnaissance, the "osarie" bed, in particular, being a great rendezvous for these enterprizes. The Hannescamps ravine, running generally east and west, on our right flank, was held alternately by the 10th Loyal N. Lancashire and 6th Bedfordshire, and further south, the 8th East Lancashire continued the line up to and including Fonquevillers, whilst our left was in touch with the 110th (Leicester) Brigade.

Observation of the country in front, within the limits of a periscope, was of course restricted. The Essarts ridge, with the village of that name towards its southern extremity, ran due north for about a mile, when the ground dipped to rise again to the still higher level on which stood the village of Monchy-au-Bois, directly opposite our extreme left flank. The enemy's front line after following the lower slopes of the

Essarts ridge\* trended north-west to Monchy, which it skirted, before again turning in a general north-east direction towards Arras, about eight miles away. From the points of view of the opposing front-line troops there was little to choose in regard to command of ground; but for observation purposes the enemy had the advantage of the Essarts ridge, whilst the extensive Adinfer Wood, well supplied with roads, formed an excellent screen for his batteries.

The Intelligence Officer (Captain F. C. Lowe) and his able assistants, working in conjunction with the Companies in the front line, kept the enemy's position under constant observation; but it was upon the frequent and successful work of the officers' patrols, and the bold deeds of the bombers, that we relied, in the main, for our information as to his doings; their reports, typed on a separate sheet of paper, were attached to the Battalion Orders of the day for the information of all ranks.

The medical arrangements were in the hands of Captain W. J. B. Selkirk, a sound and reliable Scottish officer, who had left his practice in Dunbar at the call of duty. Under his able supervision the Battalion maintained a high standard of health and fitness. The percentage of sickness, trench-feet, etc., in the 37th Division was always extremely low, and generally the lowest of all the Divisions of the 3rd Army, and at least on one occasion the 11th Warwicks had the lowest percentage of sick in the Division. Selkirk's Aid Post was in a dug-out in Hannescamps, with the nucleus of his band of stretcher-bearers, under Sergeant Hickenbottom in another dug-out in Lulu Lane, detached bearers being with the Companies in the front line.

I make no apology for dealing at such length with the dispositions of the Hannescamps sector. With little variation, and only slight changes of position, the Battalion was either here, or in the same neighbourhood, for, approximately, the half of its life as a complete unit in France; consequently the time spent there must always be a landmark in the lives of those who still survive, and to whom these months will always carry lasting memories.

\*Sketch 2.



## CHAPTER VI.

Rooke is wounded—Secrecy, or rather the want of it, in War—French Diversion at Blairville—Thain gains the first Military Cross awarded to the Division—Return to Humbercamps—German Cavalry Movements in the Infantry Zone—An Émeute—Our Patrols dominate No-Man's Land—Review by the King and the President—The "Angels of Mons" and other Stories—Dreadful Condition of the Trenches—Ration Parties.

ON the morning following our arrival Rooke accompanied me on a tour of the trenches. Just after starting we met the stretcher-bearers with the body of a man, who had accidentally been shot by a comrade who was cleaning his rifle. Accidents of this sort were, unfortunately, far too frequent when regiments first went into the line, and very particular supervision was required to eradicate them. It was just after our return, on the completion of a fairly comprehensive study of the trenches, that Rooke was caught under hostile artillery fire, four shells being placed in rapid succession close to the spot where he stood. Although hit by many splinters and bits of brick, and being badly shaken, fortunately neither he nor the man with him was severely wounded, and both were evacuated to hospital in the course of the morning. His loss just at this time was a serious blow to the Battalion. He possessed abilities and powers of organization that we could ill spare in those early days. Major A. M. Jones succeeded him as second in command, Captain A. H. Bunting taking over Jones' Company ("D").

During the day an aeroplane, with British markings, flew low over our lines. It was reported that it carried a placard marked "Fall of Arras," and it appeared to be heavily fired at by the infantry of both sides! It disappeared in the direction of the enemy, and I never heard any more about it.

My diary records nothing unusual during the next few days. Days varied for me by daily and nightly perambulations

of the trenches. The average tour on a fine day (or night) occupied from two and a half to three hours. Later in the year, when the trenches were deep in mud and water, progress was much slower, and I once came across a ration party that had been over half an hour covering twenty yards !

On the 18th September Second-Lieutenant E. E. Jenkins returning from a night reconnaissance, jumped from the parapet into his Company trench and landed on a man's bayonet, happily without serious injury ; but we lost the services of a very keen young officer for good and all. Under the custom then prevailing, the return of an officer to his own unit, once he had been invalidated home, was very uncertain, and Jenkins never rejoined. He was eventually killed in action when doing duty as Adjutant of a Battalion of Lancashire Fusiliers.

On the 23rd September our own and the 48th (Territorial) Division, on our right, displayed an unusual amount of artillery activity ; but ammunition at this period was scarce, and such activity as was shown was very mild in comparison to that which developed in 1916. Throughout this week there had been a great deal of liveliness about Arras, whence the thunder of the guns by day and the constant flashes by night had warned us that something was afoot. So far as we were concerned the secret of the attack on the 25th was well kept, though I believe it was known in England a long time beforehand. It was evidently known to the Germans, as just *before* the advance they put down a barrage of particular ferocity on the front trenches, causing important losses to our gallant infantry, though without stopping their forward movement. The importance of secrecy in war, about which so much had been written in the past, was then little realized either by the nation or by the Army, and the amount of "back chat" that went on in France and England was disgraceful. An officer stationed in England told me that he knew when and where the big offensive of the 1st July, 1916, was intended to take place two months before that date, although he was, at the time, in no position (officially) to know anything about it at all. Here again the secret was well kept in so far as it concerned the actual fighting troops, and it is particularly

galling to think that these men are the principal sufferers from all such criminal vapourings.

At a conference of Battalion Commanders on the 24th, measures were decided upon governing our action in an advance in case the Arras attack should force the enemy to dangerously weaken his troops in front of us. For the rest, the day passed with renewed artillery activity on both sides, in which we sustained slight casualties.

On the 25th September news came of the successful opening of the French attacks, and of the advance of the 1st Army about Loos. In conjunction with these attacks, the French Division on our left, composed partly of Turcos, advanced against the Blairville-Ficheux ridge. This operation, which was only in the nature of a diversion, after carrying our allies into the heart of the enemy's position, had not sufficient reserve force to enable them to maintain their hold, and they subsequently retired to their own lines, leaving the village of Ransart in flames behind them.

During the night 26th-27th, Second-Lieutenant J. S. Thain, Bombing Officer, accompanied by two bombers, reconnoitred the enemy's front, and succeeded in penetrating his wire. The alarm having been given, the small party came under a brisk fire from the German infantry; directing his companions to crawl away, Thain covered their retirement with his grenades. Throwing at first from a prone position he then changed to a kneeling one, finally delivering his grenades whilst standing erect, and completely silencing the enemy's fire. He then regained our trenches without loss. For this exploit, and for various other successful enterprises against the enemy's line, Thain received the "immediate" award of the Military Cross, this being the first distinction gained by the Division in the war.

On the 27th the Battalion finished its first tour of the trenches, and was relieved by the 13th Battalion Royal Fusiliers. The relief was completed at 9.10 p.m., the Companies returning to Humbercamps by platoons.

This out-of-trench period was largely spent in putting the border of the village of St. Amand in a state of defence, and in the never-ending work on the Corps Line (previously

referred to). The men were also marched to Pas for a much-needed wash in the Divisional baths.

During this week we received information that the Germans on our front had been seen dressed in "fancy" caps, breeches, etc., from which it was to be inferred that they were feeling the effects of the Franco-British operations in the Arras and Champagne sectors, and were under the necessity of holding the quieter parts of their front with cavalry and elements of that description. When we returned to the trenches on the 9th October we remarked an increased activity on the part of their machine-guns, which, combined with the attention that they were giving to their defences, rather confirmed this idea. Moreover, on two occasions Second-Lieutenant Bowden (Machine-Gun Officer) particularly noticed the nonchalant manner in which three mounted officers walked their horses down the Essarts road towards the front trenches; so impressed was he that on the next occasion he turned his gun on them, bringing two of them down and stampeding the other. The infantry battle-front never lent itself well to cavalry movements!

On the 11th October my diary records that a certain number of policemen's batons, studded with nails and lead excrescences, were issued to the troops; also a kind of overall suit designed as a protection against liquid fire.\* Only a

\*In connection with the use of liquid fire, gas, etc., it is instructive to recall the opinions held by soldiers of the past on the employment in war of methods such as these.

Writing, on the 14th January, 1855, to General Osten-Sacken, Commandant of Sevastopol, on the occasion of the wounding of French soldiers by harpoons, which the Russians had attached to ropes and thrown at the parapets to assist them in escalading, or in capturing prisoners, General Couroubert says:

"Permit me, M. le Gouverneur, to direct your attention to a fact, of which you are doubtless unaware. It has been reported to me that in the combats that have taken place before our trenches, officers and soldiers have been dragged down by means of ropes or hooked poles. Our soldiers have no other arms than the musket, the bayonet, and the sword, and without wishing to affirm that the employment of these means is contrary to the rules of war, may I be allowed to say, in the words of an old French expression, 'that those are certainly not the arms of courtesy.'"—(Bazancourt, "History of the Crimean Expedition," II, 182.)

few of these vulgar-looking garments were received ; and, had they arrived in sufficient quantities, they couldn't have been put on in about two seconds ; they were not therefore welcomed with any enthusiasm.

At 6-45 p.m. on the next day, following the arrival of some heavy shells, the enemy opened a furious and sustained rifle and machine-gun fire on and over the trenches immediately on our right. This tempest lasted for nearly twenty minutes, and bullets and missiles of all sorts fell about in the most promiscuous manner. The Battalion "stood to," but no further development took place, and no explanation was ever given to account for this émeute. It was presumed that either the "fancy" people in front of us had got very jumpy and thought we were going to attack them, or that they meant to impress us with the volume of their rifle fire. Our men received it with marked coolness ; they were perfectly ready to meet their opponents half-way in any small deed that they might like to adventure.

A few days later the Division on our right reported that the enemy was in "unusual strength" in front of them, and that airplane reconnaissances had located gas-cylinders in his trenches. In conformity with this news we took some additional precautions, but nothing unusual occurred. The enemy was at the same time rather active with his rifle-grenades on the left of the Battalion front, causing us a few casualties. At this period we had no means of replying to these attentions, our only possible reprisals being in the form of close attacks made by Thain's bombers under cover of night. There was never the least difficulty in getting volunteers for enterprises of this description ; on the contrary it required some care to prevent the overlapping of the different reconnoitring and fighting patrols that wished to make no-man's land their happy hunting-ground. The German, on the other hand, never an individualist, usually only scoured the country in comparatively large parties of fifty or so, and judging by what we heard, and subsequently proved for ourselves, made a special study of the ground about the Hannescamps ravine, where organizing and moving his strong patrols with his usual thoroughness he soon obtained a fair measure of success,

though, owing to this same lack of individuality and want of initiative, his activities were always liable to be brought to an untimely end, as the sequel will show. As previously explained, the area of no-man's land became much restricted in front of the centre and left of the Battalion, and here the movements of large patrols were practically impossible; it became consequently the domain of small parties, of the individual as opposed to the organized mass, in other words it was the domain of the 11th Royal Warwicks, and their control of it was never seriously disputed.

Our "out-of-trench" resort, from now on and for many months, was St. Amand, and here we arrived on the 21st October, after relief by the 13th Royal Fusiliers.

On the 25th we marched via Coigneux and Bus-les-Artois to Acheux to represent the 37th Division at a review by the King and the President of the French Republic. The weather was cold, misty, and unpleasant. The château at Acheux was the headquarters of the 4th Division, and the review was held in the fine grounds surrounding it. Here I was hospitably entertained to luncheon, the remainder of the Battalion being provided for in the adjoining park. The 4th Division was represented by the 1st Royal Warwick Regiment, 2nd Seaforth Highlanders, 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers, 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, and 7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, with some artillery elements; and the 48th Division by the 1st/4th Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry. The parade was under the Command of Major-General Count Gleichen, Commanding the 37th Division.

His Majesty and the President arrived at 3 p.m., and were received with the usual honours. After this they walked along the fronts of the different Battalions, being received on the flank by the Battalion Commanders. The King after explaining to the President that ours was "Le régiment de Warwick," at which M. Poincaré politely bowed and raised his hat, asked several questions about the Battalion, and about our march from St. Amand. A "march past" was on the programme, but was cancelled owing to the rain; and after tea in the wood that surrounded the château, we

returned to St. Amand, which was reached at 9 p.m., after a wild wet march.

As men are not usually in good marching condition after a wet tour of the trenches, the Division had supplied us with a motor ambulance for the carriage of possible march-casualties. However, it was not required; no one, of the 700 on parade, fell out on the fifteen-mile route.

It was later, when reviewing troops further north, that the King met with a rather distressing accident, and whether it was with the idea of concealing their location in France or what, I don't profess to know, but several of our men sent home vivid details of this accident, and of the part that *they* had played in it! Beginning with "The Angels of Mons," and then on through the advance of the Russian Armies through England and Ireland (they were seen at *all* stations in the south of Ireland), a regular orgy of romance had swept over the country, and I conclude that my own people had determined to have a hand in it.

Three days later we moved to Bienvillers, in relief of the 6th Bedfordshire, and became the reserve for the 110th Brigade holding the Berles sector. Although in such close proximity to the front, Bienvillers was little damaged (except of course the Church!) and quite a number of the inhabitants still remained. On the 30th the enemy put about fifty shells over and about the village, probably trying to reach a battery of 4.7 guns that had recently arrived, and was accustomed to make a deafening noise near my headquarters. I counted fourteen "dud" shells out of a succession of seventeen on this occasion.

It had rained continuously for several days, so that on returning to the line on the 2nd November we found the front and communication trenches in a dreadful condition. The main communication trench was, in parts, three feet deep in water and mud, and its sides were continually sliding down to join the mass below. Where sump-holes had been dug in the floor of the trench, the conditions were naturally worse, as the water in them was added to that on the floor level, and a false step in the darkness was followed by the most unpleasant consequences. The progress of the ration-parties

carrying up hot tea, in dixies slung upon poles (the men having, in addition, to carry their rifles and equipment) was very slow and painful, and as, in order to avoid spilling the contents, they had to adopt a constrained and rather rigid attitude, they were not in a position to pay much attention to the order of their going; in spite of this it was surprising how few accidents there were.

The approach of these parties, heralded by the aroma from the dixies, their silent passage only broken by muttered oaths as one or the other came suddenly to grief in the shifting mud and water; their quaint costumes; and the unruffled expression of their faces, as they plodded past and were swallowed up in the darkness and the sinuous windings of the trench, will always be an unforgettable memory of winter nights in the front line. Possessing only one suit of clothes, many of these men discarded their trousers before starting, thus ensuring at least one reasonably dry garment against their return; and if their consequent appearance was not imposing they could fight as well without, as with, trousers, as any Highlander can attest.

When Lulu Lane, which, during this winter, was the main artery of communication with the front line, was at its worst, the reliefs and other parties made what use they could of the Hannescamps-Monchy Road, which ran parallel to it. Whiffs of machine-gun bullets swept over this passage at night; but the configuration of the ground generally caused them to pass high enough for safety; nevertheless, they engendered a certain feeling of insecurity and exposure, and men walked along with heads bent, as against a storm. This road was unsafe in daylight and traffic on it was not allowed. One day, away to the left of it, I saw a ration party of a neighbouring unit battling along in the open and making as fast as it could for the shelter of a trench, followed by bursts of shrapnel from the hostile artillery.

With all this trouble in the communication trenches, those in the front line were naturally similarly affected, especially on the left of the Battalion front. Here it was often impossible to move along, whole bays having subsided, their fall being accelerated by shell bursts, and the huge upheavals made by



the explosion of aerial torpedoes, or minenwerfer. It was a desolate scene, and the men who lived here for a shilling a day might have been excused had they run amok when they got home among the people, who were striking for a pound a week's rise in pay, "*owing to war conditions !*" Such pumps as were available were practically useless, and the mud and water had to be baled out in buckets. In this occupation the Germans, opposite, were similarly employed, neither side making this exposure a pretext for sniping and such like attentions. The artillery, on the other hand, who were living in what was to us comparative comfort, attempted to make use of these new targets, until requested by the infantry to desist. The Boche trenches, though bad, were by no means as bad as ours, for while they had an abundance of wood for trench-floors, dug-outs, etc., we only got material with the greatest difficulty. The care and forethought that they gave to the construction of their dug-outs, in particular, were thoroughly appreciated by our people when they came to live in them.

## CHAPTER VII.

**Minenwerfer**—Sergeant Gilbert and ten men lost on Patrol—Boucher's remarkable exploit—Arrival of a Battery of 6-in. Howitzers—Their effective work—Enemy shells Hannescamps—Institution of a 24-hour Relief of the Front Line Trenches—Boucher severely wounded and awarded the Military Cross—Bravery of Lance-Corporal S. de Ste Croix.

ON the morning of the 7th November the enemy put about forty minenwerfer projectiles on and over our trenches, principally on the sector held by the right ("A") Company, near its junction with the left Company. A good deal of damage resulted, but, with the exception of one or two men being temporarily buried by the débris and an equal number suffering from shock, there were no other casualties. On the following day the performance was repeated, this time on the left Company; considerable damage was done to the trenches and to the rather mild form of shelters that answered for dug-outs, and several men were temporarily buried and half a dozen wounded. On neither occasion had our guns sufficient ammunition to reply effectively to these attacks.

That evening a small patrol of the enemy approached our wire and was fired upon by our machine-gunners. At about the same time Second-Lieutenant Thain, M.C., was in the line collecting a party, with which he intended to perform some small deed against the enemy in reply to his destructive work of the morning; but hearing that the latter had had the impertinence to investigate the damage for himself and had been driven off, he, with two of his bombers (Privates Timbrell and Bagley) immediately left the trench for the purpose of capturing or destroying this party as groans betrayed the fact that some of them, at least, were still in the vicinity. Unfortunately, they were not completely out of action, and Thain and his men were fired at from close range as they came over the sky-line, he and Pte. Timbrell being wounded,

the latter severely. Private Bagley gallantly returned the fire alone, and using his grenades with effect dispersed the enemy. For his conduct on this occasion Bagley was promoted Corporal, and received the "Green Card"\* from the Divisional General. Thain was an officer not easily replaced. He had been instrumental in training the bombers to a high state of efficiency, and his daring and originality were of great value to the Battalion as a whole, and to the bombers in particular.

Unhappily, this was not the only regrettable occurrence of that night. Hearing of Thain's wound, and being asked for permission to allow Lance-Sergeant Gilbert to take out the party of ten raiders, now without a leader, I readily gave my consent *over the telephone*. Sergeant Gilbert had distinguished himself on several occasions when in command of small patrols; he had a great eye for country, and was a fearless and enthusiastic soldier in whom I had complete confidence. In the small hours of the morning of the 7th November the party left our trenches. They never returned! Months later a letter was received from one of the men, then a prisoner in Germany; in it he described a football match of ten men under Sergeant Gilbert, in which Sergeant Gilbert's team got eleven goals and their opponents six. He described the "game" in such a way that it was evident that his patrol had been engaged with a strong hostile patrol, of which it had accounted for eleven, with a loss of six of its own men. All that we knew at the time was that, shortly after leaving our lines, a white mist fell like a mantle over the country, lying with special density in the Hannescamps ravine, and it was concluded that the patrol had either lost its way and had mistaken the enemy's line for its own, or that it had come up against one of the strong hostile patrols that operated in that neighbourhood. It was ascertained that Sergeant Gilbert usually went without a compass, relying upon his intimate

\*Cases of bravery and merit, which reached the Divisional Commander through the Infantry Brigadier, were recognized by the former by the issue to the individual concerned of a *green card*, suitably inscribed and signed. Cases of more particular merit, which the Major-General considered to be worthy of higher recognition, were reported to the Corps Commander, and the fact recorded on a *red card*.

knowledge of the ground, gained during his many reconnaissances over it. The fact that he and all the men of his party were essentially fighters made it obvious that they would not have been taken without a severe struggle, and the complete disappearance of such fine fellows was much deplored.\*

Now, the frequency with which we heard of encounters between the patrols of other units and the enemy's patrols and the fact that in spite of the great activity of our own people they had hitherto experienced no opposition of this nature, led us to conclude that the Germans had some means of knowing when patrols were leaving the line and laid plans to capture or destroy them. Suspecting that the use of the telephone, in the movements and arranging of our patrols, might have something to do with it, the strictest orders were later in force that this method of communication was not to be used under any circumstances. As explained above, Sergeant Gilbert's operation *was*, unfortunately, mentioned on the telephone, and his *was* the only patrol of ours that ever came to grief. This may have been only a coincidence ; on the other hand it is now well known that the enemy possessed means of tapping into our wires, or at least of listening to our talk over telephones, and something of the sort may have happened on this occasion.

It was on the same night that Second-Lieutenant A. E. Boucher performed the remarkably rash and daring feat of entering alone the German front line trenches. This officer was with a wiring party in front of our lines, but depressed by the (to him) unexciting nature of the work, he took advantage of the same mist that had engulfed Sergeant Gilbert's patrol to walk towards the enemy's trenches. Finding himself up against their wire and meeting with no opposition, he proceeded to cross it, though with some difficulty and damage to his clothing. Having surmounted this obstacle he lay for some time on the parapet, but hearing nothing and seeing a ladder leading into the trench, he descended it and walked along, meeting no one, till he came

\*Since the above was written, I have happily received a letter from Sergeant Gilbert with an account of his action on that night.

to a dug-out. Standing near its entrance he heard voices, but not being conversant with the language, there was nothing to be gained by listening. He thereupon returned by the way he had come, narrowly escaping an encounter *en route*, and regained his working party without incident. Absolutely fearless, he considered that his action was nothing worth mentioning, and as officers were not allowed to make reconnaissances unless accompanied by another officer or man, there was an additional reason for his not reporting it, and it only came to my notice some days later, when I got from him a very exact and detailed explanation of all that he had seen and noted. There may have been other equally daring enterprises of this nature, but I have not heard of one on the Western Front.

At about this time a battery of 6-in. howitzers arrived on the Divisional front, a section of which, under Captain Hare, R.G.A., was in immediate support of the 112th Brigade. Its arrival materially altered the situation in regard to the activity of the enemy's minenwerfer in front of us. In spite of the most cordial co-operation of Lieutenant-Colonel Phipps' batteries of field artillery, between which and ourselves the utmost good feeling existed, their light shells were unable to do enough destruction to restrict the movements of the enemy's heavy mortars, which travelled on trolley lines to the scene of action. Their position was sufficiently accurately known to our Intelligence and Company Officers to enable us to assist Hare in getting his target; in addition to which, we established a code for direct communication between our front line and his two howitzers. The efficacy of the arrangements made and the promptitude and accuracy of his section were such that on one occasion that I timed, only two minutes elapsed between the fall of an aerial torpedo on our trenches and the bursting of a 6-in. shell on the enemy's. To properly appreciate this feat it must be remembered that Hare's two guns were there to cover the Divisional front, and were not trained on any part of the comparatively small section of it in front of us. The result, at any rate, was that after a few experiences of the sort the Germans troubled us very little and confined their

activities to other parts of the field of operations. No doubt Hare's howitzers succeeded in demolishing their stands and tearing up the trolley lines. The other part of this battery was in the Berles sector, just north of us, and here Lieutenant-Colonel Mackenzie, the Battery Commander, gained a reputation for the aggressive and accurate manner in which he distributed his heavy shells. It was reported that he had landed one almost on the top of a German, who was looking over a hedge. The ruined mill from which he directed the guns was always known as "Mackenzie's Mill."\*

All this time the rain and the trenches continued to fall, and as we were no more able to stop the one than the other, we handed them over to the Royal Fusiliers, on the 14th November, with considerable relief, and retired, as before, to St. Amand. During this tour Lieutenants G. Brooke and A. E. Boucher received "cards of recognition" for conspicuously good work in reconnaissance, and several N.C.O.'s and men were similarly honoured.

The day after coming out of the trenches was principally spent by the men in scraping the collection of a fortnight's mud from their only suit of clothes, and it required some time to do it! Thereafter, the usual working-parties, route marching, attack practices, and so on, occupied the remainder of this period. From the point of view of operations, it was rather a slack time, as my diary records that on the 23rd my thirty-two bombers were visited by four Generals and about double that number of Staff Officers, all looking bored to death, as probably they were.

The enemy ineffectively shelled the village of Hannescamps on the afternoon of our return to it (26th November). Our relief of the Fusiliers had only just commenced, and though there was a great congestion in the one street, I think only a couple of men of that Regiment were wounded. Cold, frosty weather had slightly improved the state of the trenches, but rain followed and they rapidly got bad again. A system of three-day reliefs of the companies in the front line was now adopted; but as even this concession to the mud was incompatible with the proper movements of ration parties, it was

\*Sketch 2.

eventually replaced by one of a twenty-four hours' relief, and during this time the men holding the front line were not rationed from the cookers in the village, but carried their day's ration on their persons and were self-supporting for the period.

Major A. M. Jones, who for some time had been greatly troubled by an old wound received in West Africa, and had been unable to get proper rest under the prevailing conditions, was invalided home, Major T. H. Lloyd succeeding him as second in command, and Captain E. L. Routh taking Lloyd's ("B") Company.

On the 30th Boucher, with Second-Lieutenant Gross (Thain's successor in charge of bombers), and Lance-Corporal S. A. de Ste. Croix armed themselves with grenades, and carried out a punitive expedition against the German trenches in the neighbourhood of the Monchy Road. After effectively delivering their missiles at a range of twenty-five yards, among a party of the enemy which had made a show of leaving its trenches and advancing towards them, they came themselves under close rifle fire, and the gallant Boucher was shot through the body; but in spite of the severity of his wound he was able to walk back the 200 yards to our trenches, whence he was quickly evacuated to a central Clearing Station. The doctors reported that only his determined spirit and the very perfect state of his health had saved his life. For his consistently good work on many occasions he received the Military Cross in the following June.\* Lance-Corporal de Ste. Croix was promoted Corporal and given the "Green Card" for his conduct in this affair. This young Jersey man was a regular tiger for fighting, and was never happy unless engaged in some foray of this description. He was subsequently awarded both the Distinguished Conduct and Military Medals, and later received a commission in the Machine Gun Corps.

On the following day I went on seven days' leave, making the journey to Amiens in a car kindly lent me by my namesake, Captain Collison, the Divisional Ordinance Officer. Major Lloyd commanded the Battalion during my absence.

\*He was killed in action in the following November, during the operations on the Ancre; where for his conspicuous gallantry he was recommended for the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“The Barn Owls”—State of the Trenches—Rumours—Sunshine on the Battle-Front—Private Hakesley’s Mud-Bath—Christmas Day—A Month’s Losses—Oil-Cans—Three-day Tours—Courts-Martial—Visit to Berles-au-Bois—Return of Rooke—Reconnaissance of the Gastineau Sector.

ON my return from leave, the Battalion was in reserve at St. Amand, with a detachment under Captain Brocksopp, at Pas, cutting wood. It was always annoying to see Infantry, “The Queen of Battles,” cutting wood during the greatest war in the history of the world !

A Divisional concert party, called “The Barn Owls,” toured the country within the Divisional area, and their performances were greatly appreciated by the troops. The band and performers were selected from men of histrionic ability, and apparently there were many candidates, as those chosen were quite up to London music hall standards. The “girl” was quite good looking, and the Brigade Transport Officers, in particular, were generally reported to admire “her” greatly. The performances were given in a large barn, which at this season had the temperature of an ice-house.

I now found that the beautiful trenches that we had constructed at St. Amand, on the northern lisière of the village, had mostly subsided, or were full of ice and water. I call them beautiful, as they were the only trenches that I saw that fulfilled the conditions of invisibility with the other conditions proper to their construction ; but they were a sorry sight now.

On the 17th December Beyts (the Adjutant) went to Hannescamps to see how matters were progressing there. He arrived at “Piccadilly Circus” just as the Germans started to shell it, and narrowly escaped being hit, a shell killing and wounding nine men just as he passed. He reported that the trenches



were still bad. We were able to confirm this when we re-occupied them three days later ; in particular Lulu Lane, the main communication trench, had become in parts so wide that it had entirely lost its usefulness as a protection against shrapnel.

"Considerable movement" behind the German line was reported on the 21st, and it was "believed" that the German 111th Division, opposite, had been relieved by the 4th Guard Division. The French, too, on our left had been warned to expect an attack in the "near future." No attack, however, matured, and the "considerable movement" soon became normal.

On the same day a telephone message was received to the effect that our troops in the Near East had successfully evacuated the Gallipoli Peninsula. About a month before we had been told that they had forced the passage of the Dardanelles, whereupon, wishing to encourage the Boches, our bombers had planted a notice to that effect in their wire ; but, being probably better informed than we were, they greeted the announcement with ironical cheers ! I tried, unsuccessfully, to get the author, or authors, of this canard\* brought to justice. A severe sentence would have shown them what we thought of them.

At 11-35 a.m. on the 23rd December the sun was seen, also a patch of blue sky. In celebration (presumably) of this unique event, the 48th and 37th Divisions bombarded the German lines, the enemy making a feeble reply.

On Christmas Eve the Divisional General, with Vincent (G.S.O.I) made a gallant but unsuccessful attempt to visit the front line. At this time it was practically impossible to reach it by way of the communication trenches. The only thing to do was to walk across the open ground, but this was only possible at night. It was when trying to visit them, that night, by the same trench that my faithful orderly (Hakesley), who always preceded me, keeping up a running fire of remarks, such as : "'Ole 'ere, Sir," "Wire, 'ere, Sir," "Make way there !" (very sternly), suddenly disappeared, and the next moment I bumped into his head with my knees ! It took

\*Refer to the false report of the forcing of the Dardanelles.

Lloyd and me about twenty minutes to get him out of the morass in which he was firmly stuck up to the waist, and as we were eventually equally dirty and heated, we climbed out of the trench and completed our tour on the top. Just after midnight (therefore on Christmas Day) we arrived rather suddenly upon a sentry of "A" Company, who, in spite of the fact that by our falling upon him he had been brought heavily to the ground, civilly replied "Same to you, Sir," to our seasonable greeting! We regained headquarters at 3 a.m. Later in the morning two of our airmen celebrated the day by "looping the loop" over our trenches. The Germans watched the performance without interference, only acknowledging their skill by a couple of shells, as they flew away. A large part of my dug-out subsided gently on this day, as well as a considerable portion of the mud hut used as an Orderly Room. But all occurrences of this nature were ably and quickly dealt with by Packer (the Pioneer Sergeant) and his clever, hard-working assistants.

"The Jersey Tiger" and Private Cooper bombed a hostile working party effectively and at close range on the 26th, for which they received the "Red" and "Green" Cards respectively; D. Ste. Croix being promoted Acting-Sergeant and Cooper Lance-Corporal.

There had recently been increased activity on the part of the opposing artilleries, and an unusual amount of work in the air, accompanied, of course, by a corresponding increase of anti-aircraft fire. We had two men wounded by splinters from air-shells, and it is remarkable that these are the only cases of injuries, by this means, that I came across during fourteen months' service in France.

A welcome change in the weather, combined with the strenuous work of officers and men, now brought about a considerable improvement in the state of the trenches. The better weather was mainly responsible, as without adequate material it was impossible to cope with the prevailing conditions. The year ended with a report that the French Division on our left was "apprehensive of an attack," and by a burst of rifle fire on our right, accompanied by loud invitations to the "Sausages," opposite, "to come out and fight."

The losses in the infantry of the Division by shell and rifle fire, during the month, amounted to 170 killed and wounded.

Instruction in the use of the bomb, as the principal weapon in trench warfare, now occupied a prominent part of the training during the out-of-trench period, but there is nothing particular to record of our stay at St. Amand, and on the 13th we again relieved the 13th Royal Fusiliers at Hannescamps. Here we made the acquaintance of the new German airplane, the "Fokker," which appeared to be a very rapid mover and was remarkably picturesque, as it flashed like silver against the blue of the sky. Another new arrival was the mortar shell called the "oil-can"; the Boche sent over several of these for our inspection. They were extremely noisy (when they burst) but almost lady-like in comparison to the minenwerfer.

On the 20th we received a visit from a Lieutenant-Colonel, who was on an instructional tour, previous to bringing out his Battalion from England. These tours usually lasted three days, though occasionally they were longer. It depended largely upon the individuals themselves, whether they benefited by them or not. This one was greedy for knowledge on every detail, and deserved to benefit, as I hope he did. Some of them were fortunate, or unfortunate, enough to spend a great deal of their time in dodging shells and bullets (real and imaginary). These didn't benefit as much as they might otherwise have done; but they were more appreciated by the junior officers whose trenches they visited.

I have a note in my diary to the effect that the number of Court-martial cases in the Battalion for the period 1st August 1915—19th January, 1916, was sixteen. Only one or two of these was at all of a serious nature, and even this low average of three a month was subsequently greatly reduced. In fact one might say that there was practically no crime in the Battalion, using the word "crime" in its military sense, to denote an offence. I remember, as a subaltern, that the Company Orderly Corporal came to my quarters, one morning, and informed me that "there were two *criminals* for disposal by the Company Commander." Their names being entered on a "crime report" the inference to the Corporal was that

they really *were* criminals, though both men had only been three minutes late for parade ! These yellow forms are now, I think, called "Offence Reports" ; the "criminals" are called "the accused," and so on. In spite of all these new fashions and the outcry against the justice and procedure of courts-martial, I fancy that most soldiers would rather be tried by the military code than by the civil. It is not perhaps a perfect code, and there are delays in its procedure, but they are delays of detail in comparison to the civil one, with its Coroners' Courts, Magistrates' Courts, and other Courts, with all their jokes and their jugglings (especially their jokes), all of them, as in a murder case, trying the same man for the same thing, and if they don't all call it a trial, it amounts to that, to the wretched person in the dock, at any rate. But one despairs of reforming the law, and the Briton revels in its pompous ritual.\*

At about 3 a.m. on the 25th there was very heavy artillery fire on our right. We heard later that under cover of this, the Germans raided a section of the trenches held by a neighbouring division and took away some rifles and a machine-gun.

On the 27th, Général Gaillet, Commanding 88th French Division, with his A.D.C. the Marquis de Joigné (a Royalist Officer), together with Count Gleichen and his A.D.C. (Lieutenant Mallet) had tea with us at St. Amand, and attended a performance of the "Barn Owls" afterwards. The 88th French Division prolonged to the north the line held

\*A ludicrous incident very descriptive of the Englishman's regard for the law, and of his refusal to allow it to be relegated to the background, occurred on the occasion of the destruction by our airmen of a hostile airship. A half-burned boot and a pair of field-glasses were carefully collected from the débris, and on these relics a Coroner and twelve of his countrymen solemnly "sat." After a prolonged inquiry and the taking of much evidence, these gentlemen recorded their opinion that the owners of the relics had been "justifiably" killed ! A full description of this farce appeared in the Press, where it was solemnly received by a populace, properly tenacious of the Majesty of the Law ! It presumably occurred to no one that a verdict of "Wilful murder," which these old mushrooms might quite conceivably have brought in, would have necessitated a warrant for the arrest of the King, the Houses of Lords and Commons, and the whole of the armed forces of the Crown, as "accessories before the fact !"

by the French Cavalry Division, immediately on our left. At 7-30 p.m. there was an alarm of gas on the Divisional front. The gas gongs in the village were sounded, and the inhabitants became rather anxious, but seeing that the wind blew steadily from the south-west, there was not much cause for excitement.

On the 29th I rode with the Adjutant and the Company Commanders to Berles-au-Bois to become acquainted with the defences protecting that village, the northern end of which was in French keeping. Like all the protected villages that I saw on our front the fortifications were in an indifferent state of repair, due undoubtedly to the scarcity of men and material available for their upkeep.

On the 4th February Captain Selkirk, R.A.M.C., who had been with the Battalion since June, 1915, was posted to Doullens for duty. Everyone greatly regretted his departure.

Two days later we returned to Hannescamps, and on the 7th received a visit from officers of the 6th Battalion Gloucester Regiment, which relieves us here on the 13th February.

On the 8th Rooke suddenly and most unexpectedly rejoined, having quite recovered from his wounds received in September last. His arrival was entirely due to the exertions of the Divisional Commander, who had spared no pains to influence those in authority to send him back to us. During this tour of the trenches we took in hand the care of the many graves of the French soldiers (largely of the 43rd Colonial Infantry) who had fallen in defence of the village in February, 1915. Captain W. T. Hart was given control of the work, which was most thoroughly carried out.

Companies of the 6th Gloucester and 8th Worcester Battalions, 144th Brigade, 48th (Territorial) Division, relieved our Companies on the 13th, and we took over billets in Humbercamps with the 8th East Lancashire. On the following day, the Adjutant, Company Commanders, and myself rode to the sector north of Berles-au-Bois, where the 8th Leicestershire, 110th Brigade, had replaced the French on the night 10th-11th February. Here we received details of the defensive line from Lieutenant-Colonel Mignon and his officers, whose Battalion we were relieving on the 16th.

## CHAPTER IX.

The Gastineau Line—I relieve Robinson—Opening of the Verdun Battle—The 4th Army comes into Line—We return to Hannescamps—Formation of a Machine Gun Company—Shells around Headquarters—We become Corps Reserve—Conference of Commanding-Officers at Auxi-le-Château—Return to Hannescamps—A German Raid—Routh's successful Patrol—Action gains him the Military Cross.

ON the evening of the 16th February we took over the new line. The battle dispositions here were totally different to those that obtained in the Hannescamps sector. Two Companies held the line on a front of about half a mile ; one Company was in support nearly 1,000 yards in rear, and occupied a half-closed work, called Fortin 147, which had been sited with a view to disputing a hostile attempt against the Gastineau Ridge ; the remaining Company was in reserve at Berles-au-Bois. There was nothing very noticeable about the front line, which was distant from the enemy's, on an average, about 200 yards. Both lines, however, were remarkably heavily wired, with the result that the area of no-man's land was restricted to a width of not more than 100 yards, and there was every indication that the French and their opponents had led a quiet life among these surroundings. From the front line the ground sloped gently upwards to the Gastineau Ridge, on the forward crest of which another line of trenches largely commanded the intervening ground. Lying a little back from the ridge was the Fortin 147. Here I lived with Rooke, in an extremely small and evil dug-out, several inches deep in liquid mud. There had been a good deal of rain, and the main communication trench was in a deplorable condition. At night we overcame this difficulty by going the rounds across country, but even then it took some time, and we only arrived back at our mud-house at 4 a.m. on the first occasion. We found, of course, that the front trenches

were equally wet and muddy ; at the same time it was a great relief to know that in case of attack the dispositions were such that an important portion of my force was unlikely to be involved in a first onrush, and would consequently be available to come into action later, as occasion offered. Here at any rate our eggs were not all in one basket, as at Hannescamps.

The 111th Brigade (Brigadier-General R. Barnes, D.S.O.) held the line, facing Ransart, on our left.

Nothing worthy of record occurred during our stay in this sector. The weather was bad, and the trenches vied in desolation and mud with those at Hannescamps.

Robinson went on leave on the 22nd, and I relieved him in command of the Brigade. On the same day the 110th Brigade relieved ours in the line, and I returned to St. Amand (Brigade Headquarters), the Battalion going to Humbercamps. There was a heavy fall of snow during the night, which continued for several days.

On the 24th came a report of considerable hostile movement in the Lille and Verdun regions, and all leave was stopped. On the following day the enemy attacked towards the latter place on a twenty-five mile front, and opened the campaign of 1916, of which this was the first phase, the battle of the Somme being the second.

Following upon a certain number of official and unofficial reports of a contradictory nature as to our future movements, we received definite orders on the evening of the 28th February to cancel our return to the Berles sector, arranged for the following day, and to take over our former positions in the Hannescamps sector instead. Large troop movements were taking place at this time on the Western front, and the 3rd Army was extending northwards as far as, and including, Arras ; a new-formed 4th Army coming into line to the south. Under these arrangements the 37th Division became the right division of the 3rd Army, the village of Fonquevillers (opposite Gommecourt) marking its southern limit. The 7th Corps now consisted of the 4th, 37th, and 55th Divisions.

The Brigade relieved the 144th Brigade (Brigadier-General Nicholson) that evening, with two Battalions (11th Royal

Warwicks and 10th Loyal N. Lancashire), in front line, 8th East Lancashire in support at Bienvillers-au-Bois, 6th Bedfordshire at Pommier. The Battalion front was now extended northwards to include the whole Hannescamps salient, and, in addition, some extra trenches were taken over on the right. While the relief was in progress a lively artillery action was taking place in the region of Fricourt, about fifteen miles to the south—probably a raid. I spent the next few days visiting the trenches of the two Battalions in the line.

On the 4th March a new formation, called a Machine Gun Company, arrived for attachment to the Brigade. It consisted of sixteen Vickers guns, and the necessary personnel for manning them; but no reserves of any description to replace casualties. Robinson returned from leave on the 5th and I rejoined the Battalion at Hannescamps. On the same day it was relieved by the 6th Bedfordshire and took over billets in Pommier, where it became the Brigade reserve.

Whilst at Pommier both Major Lloyd and Second-Lieutenant D. J. O'Dell were invalided to England. These officers had served with the regiment since its formation in 1914, and had done yeoman service in its cause.

We relieved the 6th Bedfordshire at Hannescamps on the 12th, and put three Companies in the front line, the remaining Company being in reserve in the village. Each Trench-Company held about 500 yards of front, and as their strength, at this time, did not exceed 130 rifles per Company, the disposition of the Battalion, strung out in a long line, was only to be compared to a badly placed outpost line. Headquarters was now in the village, and not in its former position under a bank on the Hannescamps-Fonquevillers Road. As a mess, we occupied a room in the only house that had not been levelled by shell fire; but on the 15th March, just after breakfast, about fifty shells were put about it, one bursting in the ceiling of the messroom and doing a fair amount of damage to the interior. This attention was repeated at dinner time, and the meal was finished in my dug-out. Phipps, Commanding 125th Field Artillery Brigade, happened to be with me during part of the performance, and was instrumental in getting a reply delivered to the Germans.



Following upon this business we moved headquarters to its former position on the road.

The hostile artillery was now occasionally active, and several casualties were sustained; but on the whole there was no firing above the normal.

On the 18th March the 4th Division, which had been "resting" in Corps Reserve, came into line in place of the 37th Division, and we were relieved by the 13th Light Infantry under Thicknesse, who was with me at Charterhouse. He had a fine Battalion, and was killed at its head in the desperate fighting about Serre on the following 1st July. There was great artillery activity at Hébuterne as we were returning to St. Amand that night. It denoted, I believe, another raid on the 48th Division, a formation to which the Germans seemed to have taken a particular fancy.

The 37th Division was now in Corps Reserve, and I took the opportunity of another few days' leave. On my return I found the Battalion, less "A" Company and seventy men of "C," at Mondicourt on the Arras-Amiens railway. The detachment was at Laherlière, about six miles up the line. On the 9th April we went into billets at Le Souich, and I left for Auxi-le-Château, to attend a Conference of Commanding Officers, held at the 3rd Army Infantry School.\* The other Colonels from the 37th Division were White† (10th Royal Fusiliers), Pretor-Pinney‡ (13th Rifle Brigade), Des Voeux§ (Royal Engineers), with Fuller|| (52nd Light Infantry (G.S.O.2)). The latter, though junior in rank, was

\*The originator and first Commandant of this School was Colonel (afterwards Brigadier-General) R. J. Kentish, 87th Fusiliers. Its function was to instruct N.C.O.'s and junior officers in the latest methods of position warfare and weapon-training. A high standard of discipline and proficiency was maintained, and small parties of each unit were periodically sent there for instruction. Senior officers of every rank, together with representatives from the allied Powers, also attended its lectures and demonstrations.

†Hon. R. White, afterwards Brigadier-General, C.B., C.M.G.

‡Killed in action, 1917 (28th April).

§C.R.E., 37th Division.

||J. F. C. Fuller, D.S.O., afterwards a professor at the Staff College, Camberley.

by virtue of his office a sort of M.C. at the meetings, and his tactful behaviour was greatly instrumental in restraining the turbulence of his audience, whose activities frequently centred round such personalities as "Hindenburg" and "Enver Pasha" (by which names two of the conferring officers were known) to the entire exclusion of the real subject under discussion. On the whole we had a good deal of leisure, which I mainly spent in walks about the neighbourhood with Green\* of the 60th.

The Conference broke up on the 16th April, and I returned to Le Souich. The days were passed in musketry and other training, diversified by football, and the usual wood-cutting parties, of an average strength of 400, in the picturesque Bois de Robermont; and by smoke and other demonstrations given by Millard of Ours at the Brigade Grenade School at Sus St. Leger.

On the 23rd April Falvey-Beyts left, on attachment to the Divisional Staff, and was succeeded in the Adjutancy by Captain W. J. H. Little.

On the 29th I was informed, in the strictest confidence, that the Division would relieve the 4th Division in the line on the 1st or 2nd May. There was really no cause for "strict confidence," as the matter had been generally known to the men a day or two beforehand! Information of this nature usually emanated from the Regimental canteens, and an Information Bureau of this description had recently been successfully inaugurated by Rooke.

We left Le Souich on the 1st May, and marching via Lucheux, Humbercourt, and Coullemont, halted for two and a half hours in a valley north-west of Couturelle. The march was resumed via Gombremetz, and Humbercamps was reached at 4-30 p.m. on a fine, clear day. Strength of the Battalion was about 900. On the following day we took over the line at Hannescamps from Wood's Battalion of the Rifle Brigade. This Battalion, together with the remainder of the 4th Division, was being withdrawn in preparation for the coming offensive of the 29th June† or, as Wood expressed

\*Afterwards Brigadier-General H. C. R. Green, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

†Afterwards altered to 1st July.

it, "to be fattened up." He fell as did Thicknesse whilst leading his Battalion on the following 1st July.

Three Companies now held the front line, with one in reserve. The Hannescamps ravine, and the line for about 500 yards south of it, was also included in our front system, and a great extent of no-man's land was brought within reach of the activities of our reconnoitring and offensive patrols. Our left was, approximately, in its former position; but on the right we now extended beyond the northern outskirts of Fonquevillers, which lay just north-west of the wood and village of Gommecourt, a heavily fortified salient in the enemy's line, and, later, the scene of some bitter fighting.

At 2-30 a.m. on the 4th May the enemy opened a sudden and intense bombardment on the Divisional front. His barrage extended from the Berles sector, on the north, to the right of the 6th Bedfordshire, where the latter touched our left Company at the Hannescamps salient. The southern limit of this storm was, in fact, clearly marked by the communication trench, Lulu Lane. The bombardment lasted with sustained fury for three-quarters of an hour, and was replied to by all the guns on the Divisional front. Throughout it was steadily punctuated by the ear-splitting explosions of the minenwerfer, which appeared to be particularly directed against the line held by the 6th Bedfordshire. It ended just as dawn was breaking, and almost as suddenly as it had begun. In the weird silence that followed was heard the singing of countless larks welcoming the coming day, and the effect of this outburst of music after the infernal clamour of the night was distinctly impressive. The infantry casualties on the front attacked were about 130 killed and wounded. The front line of the 6th Bedfordshire, where the full fury of the storm had burst, was obliterated, and a party of Germans entered the devastated area, when the barrage had temporarily lifted to the support lines. It was not definitely established whether this party had taken any prisoners, as only one or two of our badly wounded men survived the ordeal, and they were unable to give a coherent account of what had happened. A few hours before the commencement of the raid our left Company had handed over

a portion of its front to the 6th Bedfordshire, and so escaped being seriously involved in the action. The Battalion stood to arms, and Brocksopp's Company pushed out a platoon into no-man's land with the object of engaging any hostile elements that might be advancing against the Bedfordshire. But his timely action was not able to affect the issue.

Courtney, of the Bedfordshire—the man-of-all work and *fidus Achates* at Brigade Headquarters—visited the trenches after dawn and described the scene as a “shambles.” He said that identification of the dead was very difficult, as their remains had to be collected in sandbags.

This was the first raid made against the 37th Division. In spite of the meticulous care that they devoted to all operations of the sort, the Germans seldom attained the success that we did in similar enterprises. The last word in all raids rested with the actual raiders themselves, i.e., the infantry; and the training of the latter in the German Army, together with the whole character of the nation itself, was opposed to anything except *organized* action, and consequently to the qualities of initiative that this sort of action required.

On the night 10th-11th May Captain E. L. Routh, with Second-Lieutenants Jenkins and Stalker, and fifty-three N.C.O.'s and men, finally disposed of the pretensions of a strong hostile patrol to dominate no-man's land in the region of the Hannescamps Ravine. As previously recorded, our front now embraced this area, and it was quite unthinkable that it should be controlled by anyone except ourselves. The enemy's movements had been carefully watched by Routh, who laid his plans accordingly.

It was his (the enemy's) custom to advance in a fan-shaped formation towards the British line and to then assemble in a cutting, about 200 yards from our trenches, before either continuing his advance northwards or returning to his own lines. Routh's plan was framed to meet either eventuality. In effect, when his patrol had left our trenches, the enemy, in about equal strength, was found concentrating in the cutting at the conclusion of his first movement. The subalterns, with thirty men, were at once directed to attack from the north, at the moment that Routh, with the remainder of the patrol,

after a detour to the east, came into the fight against his right flank. The manœuvre was quite successful. Both attacks were made simultaneously and with great dash. The party under Jenkins was received with a sharp fire, but Routh's men had little opposition and got to work with bayonet and bomb, and the surviving Germans scattered in every direction. No prisoners were taken; but a dead N.C.O. was brought back for identification purposes.

Our losses were one killed (Private Rickarby) and nine slightly wounded. A conservative estimate of the German loss was twenty-four killed and wounded, mostly by the bombs of the flank attack, which came upon them when massed in the cutting and whilst engaged with the frontal attack from the north.

As showing the excellence of the German intelligence system—for it must be remembered that the Battalion had only recently come into this part of the line—as showing also, the linguistic abilities of their rank and file, the opening of our attack was received with shouts of "Here are the bloody Warwicks again," and other familiar expressions of the sort.

For his initiative and leading, on this occasion, Routh received the "immediate" award of the Military Cross, and Sergeant Yates was selected from amongst several non-commissioned officers and private soldiers for that of the Military Medal.

The whole affair well merited the appreciation that it received from the Army, Corps, and Divisional Commanders.

## CHAPTER X.

Preparations for advancing the Line—German movements—Visit to fronts held by 5th and 55th Divisions, and the Line adjacent to the Vimy Ridge—Return to Hannescamps—Hostile Trench-mortar Activity—Sausage Balloons—We install Gas-Cylinders—Preliminary measures for the attack on the 1st July, 1916—Rôle of the 37th Division in the Battle.

PLANS were now being made to advance the line on the Battalion front; and on the 13th the ground was reconnoitred by Des Voeux, C.R.E., who was accompanied by Shewring of Ours. The reconnaissance was covered by a patrol of four men of Hart's Company, under Sergeant de Ste. Croix.

Our friends of the 111th Brigade, with whom we had exchanged duties for so many months in the Hannescamps sector, were now holding the line north of Berles-au-Bois, their place being taken by the 110th Brigade, so that it was by Mignon's 8th Leicestershire that we were relieved on the 14th, prior to going into billets at La Cauchie.

For the next few days I was answering for Robinson, who was on leave. Brigade Headquarters were at Saulty, in a very handsome château standing in park-like grounds, containing a miniature edition of the Hampton Court maze.

On the 18th May, following an interview with Count Gleichen, I motored with Stourton to Wanquetin, to look for possible bivouac grounds in that neighbourhood.

The enemy was suspected of some trickery in the vicinity of Arras, where he had been seen excavating gun-positions and showing other signs of activity above the normal. He was still heavily engaged in the Verdun region, and exploiting to the full the alarm of the Allied Press at his near approach

to the once famous fortress\*, and it was in his interests, by feints and other means, to keep the British Armies entirely occupied on their own front. However that might be, the 112th Brigade, being temporarily in reserve, was held in readiness to assist the Divisions in the Arras sector in case of attack; and Stourton, Fuller (G.S.O.2), and I, with the Battalion Commanders, and the Brigade Machine Gun Officer, started on a tour of inspection of that area on the 19th.

On that day we visited the zone of the 55th Division and examined the ground from the ridge overlooking the Crinchon Valley, and called "The Wailly Switch," after the village of that name. The next day we motored to Headquarters, 5th Division (Major-General R. B. Stevens) at Duisans, and then wandered through mazes of trenches almost as far as Roclincourt. The weather was excessively hot and sultry, and fitful hostile shelling was in progress, accentuating rather than relieving the parched and desolate scene. We lunched at Arras in a building taken over by "The Officers' Club." The city itself, although knocked about, was still far from being in ruins.

Our third visit was to the neighbourhood of Neuville St. Vaast and Ecurie. From the tower at Mont St. Eloy an extensive prospect can be had of all this part of the country which is, throughout, commanded by the famous Vimy Ridge. That ever-restless position appeared to be living up to its reputation, as the hostile shelling was of quite a lively nature. In a cutting near St. Eloy I was conducted into an elaborately-constructed stronghold, which, it was said, constituted the Corps observation post. Mounting some

\*The great value attached to geographical terms, and to "place-names," such as Verdun, Paris, Amiens, and the like, by the British Press, was not really so extraordinary, if one remembers (a) that one hundred years had elapsed since the nation had taken part in a war on the grand scale; (b) that in the wars in which it *had* been engaged the occupation of "places," such as Sebastopol, Delhi, Peking, and Kumasi had exercised a predominant influence on the course of several of these campaigns; and finally (c) that our Press was often greatly misled by the articles of military and other writers, who posed as authorities on war. "Authorities" of the kind that talked of the trenches round Verdun as "The Gates of Paris"; that almost invariably confused tactics with strategy; and committed countless other technical military atrocities.

steps inside, we, by this means, came level with the top of the bank. Here a rope was pulled; which, raising a shutter, gave the observer a perfect view, at close hand, of the luxuriant grasses that covered the embankment and nothing more. After other interesting experiences we had lunch at Arras, and then returned to our own area, amidst renewed signs of liveliness on the Ridge.

On the 23rd May we concluded our inspectional tour by a visit to the defences in the Crinchon Valley, i.e., from the Rivière system of villages up to Wailly. We there heard that during the night (22nd-23rd) the enemy had attacked the 47th Division, on a front of about a mile, driving them from their advanced trenches on the Vimy Ridge.\*

On the 26th Robinson returned from leave, and I rejoined my own people at La Cauchie. That evening we relieved the 8th Leicestershire at Hannescamps.

Some progress had been made in the construction of the trenches in front of our line. This work we continued, and to minimize casualties no working parties were employed on successive nights on the same trenches, as the Germans usually subjected new work to shell-fire on the night following its construction. In consequence of these precautions the Brigade was able to continue its task with little loss.

On the morning of the 28th a few of us made a perambulation of the new line. It was not a very pleasant walk, as the trenches in some parts were no deeper than two feet, and as there were no bantams in the party, our small procession progressed in a hunch-backed formation, varied occasionally by wild rushes across the more exposed places. For some reason or other the enemy was slow to take advantage of this opening before the heated and perspiring party gained the shelter of more substantial works.

During the week, at odd times during the day and night, the enemy was unpleasantly active with light trench mortars, which he directed persistently about Routh's Company Headquarters in Collingbourne Avenue. They blew up his cook-house on the 29th, killing his cook, an excellent soldier called Greenman, who had given up a lucrative appointment

\*I think they were soon afterwards retaken.



in America at his country's call ; and a day or two later, McGrath, the cheery and convivial Second-in-Command of the 8th East Lancashire, Hallett of the Artillery, and another man were all killed at almost the same spot. Unfortunately we were never able to locate these mortars, neither had we anything suitable wherewith to reply to them. A sausage-balloon was always conspicuously *en evidence* in this neighbourhood, and doubtless we owed what we got to its watchfulness. Certainly it always appeared to be looking directly into the very open position of Collingbourne Avenue.

A gunner on being asked why he didn't shoot at it, said his people were not allowed to fire at sausage-balloons ; but he could give no reason for this strange order, and was most anxious, himself, to have a try.\* In those days balloons were fairly immune, and proportionately enterprising.

In the course of this month, parties of the Battalion were constantly employed in carrying what were called "accessories," "ginger-beer bottles" (or any other names as remote as possible from what they really were, namely gas-cylinders) to the front trenches. Great secrecy was very properly observed in this work, and the most detailed arrangements were necessary to ensure their collection and carriage, at night, through the intricacies of the front and communication trenches. Carelessness or accidents might have been attended with serious consequences to the men handling them, and it was of course essential that no hint of the business should reach the long ears of the Germans. On the 16th June, for instance, there were five such parties, each consisting of one officer and sixty men ; the parties leaving La Cauchie in the evening, and only returning to billets just before dawn. As a result, these engines were successfully installed on a large part of the Divisional front, without loss to ourselves or their presence being suspected by the enemy.

The Battalion re-occupied the line on the 18th. In addition to the work on the new advanced trenches, other working-

\*Being an independent sort of person he eventually did have a try ! At his second shot the sausage came slowly to ground, which was what his friends in the Infantry wanted. Whether or not the balloon was hit I am unable to say.

parties were busily engaged in the construction of dug-outs along the Hannescamps-Fonquevillers Road, in improving the existing cover, and in the preparation and extension of the Regimental Aid Post, or dressing-station. Officers who were seldom seen in the fighting zone now occasionally appeared there ; activity in the air became more marked, and there was a noticeable increase of artillery fire on our side, the hostile defences about the Gommecourt Salient receiving particular attention.

On the 23rd June there was heavy rain, and the trenches became very water-logged ; but wading through a foot or two of tepid water was not a great hardship after the ice-baths of the winter months.

Beginning with the 24th, the days of the week were now to be known by the letters U to Z, the latter letter being the 29th June, on which date the attack was arranged to take place. During the greater part of this period the rain continued to fall intermittently and the artillery preparation to increase in volume and violence. The Germans, for the most part, replied only feebly, and kept so well under ground that it was possible for our infantry to observe the bombardment without their customary avoidance of exposure. If one could believe the enemy's accounts, the killing effect of this shelling was slight, at any rate during the days preceding the 1st July ; but however that might be, its effect on his positions could be well seen by us, and its results on his nerves could be easily imagined. The slopes about Pigeon Wood,\* and all the ground from the "Z" trench up to Gommecourt, ground which recently had been more or less green, was now so thrown about and shattered that it appeared like waves and hillocks of brown earth, and every vestige of grass soon disappeared.

At 9-45 a.m. on the 26th ("W" day) the 56th and 46th Divisions discharged smoke bombs on the front Hébuterne-Fonquevillers, and later in the day three German sausage-balloons were brought down in flames, to the great delight of the British audience.

\*Sketch 3.

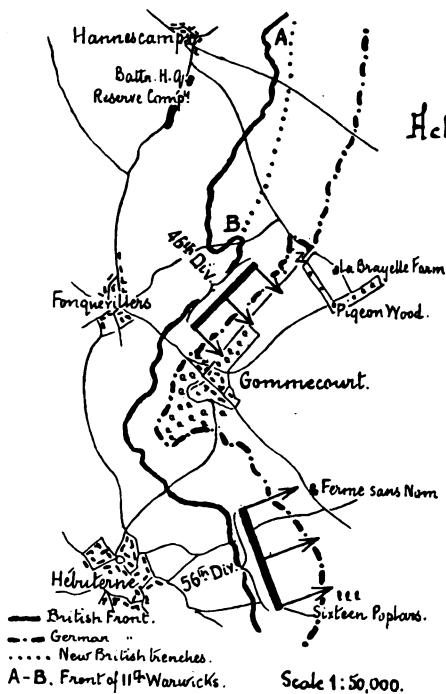
At 2-30 p.m. on the following day the 37th Division discharged gas over the enemy's line at, and north of, Monchy-au-bois, following it up by a second discharge at 10 p.m. over the same area. Both discharges caused the enemy to put down a barrage on our front line, but with little effect. These tactics were repeated on the 29th, smoke clouds being added to the gas attacks, which were followed up by raids by the 110th and 111th Brigades on the enemy's front trenches. The 29th should have marked the opening of the attack, but was re-named Y1 day, the 30th being Y2 day, and the 1st July Z day.

The rôle of the 37th Division was to cover the left flank of the 46th, in its attack on the Gommecourt salient. It was with this object that we advanced our line, as already related, and on the 30th we completed our preparations by installing smoke bombs, which were to be thrown over the parapets on the morning of the attack, and five minutes before the infantry advance, which was timed for 7-30 a.m. (zero hour). Preparations were also made to sweep with fire the ground on the exposed flank of the attacking Divisions, and generally to ensure them against hostile action on that side. It was understood that the battle in this area was to be in the nature of a containing action, and that the salient comprised by the wood and village of Gommecourt having been, so to speak, bitten off, the advance was not to extend beyond a line roughly marked by the localities, 16 Poplars—Ferme sans Nom—Z trench.\*

The night of the 30th June passed quietly enough, broken only by what sounded like songs of revelry, though they may have been hymns, from the troops on our right. The 37th Division never held concerts in the front trenches.

\*Sketch 3.





## Action at Gommecourt 1. July 1916.

SKETCH 3.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME.

The Action at Gommecourt—We finally leave Hannescamps—March to Halloy—Break-up of the 37th Division—In Motor-lorries to Mellincourt—In Reserve on the Tara-Usna Ridge—German Prisoners—An Unhappy Old Gentleman—We relieve 58th Brigade at Contalmaison, and take three Field-Guns—Heavy Shelling of our Front—69th Brigade take Contalmaison—Into the “Blue”—Vokin’s Timely Action and Death—Orders and Counter-Orders—Casualties.

“At 6-30 a.m. our artillery opened an intense bombardment of the German positions about Gommecourt. At 7-25 a.m. smoke was discharged along the fronts of the 37th, 46th, and 56th Divisions, and at 7-30 a.m. (zero hour) the two latter Divisions attacked from the north and south. Up to midnight no really accurate record of the results of these actions is obtainable ; but the advance of a Brigade of the 46th Division was stopped, and renewed at 3-30 p.m. I watched this phase from the Divisional line, but was unable to see any progress, though there apparently was some. The attack of the 56th Division (hidden from us by the bend of Gommecourt Wood) is reported to have been satisfactory—also unsatisfactory. Very heavy fighting was going on here at about 10 p.m. . . . At 1 a.m. (2nd July) information was received that the 46th Division was to withdraw to its original line, after attempting to extricate two Battalions which had not been located since the commencement of the attack.”

The above account is taken from my diary, under date 1st July, and I only record it as an example of the confused and scanty nature of the information that reaches those whose knowledge of battles is usually confined to what takes place in their immediate neighbourhood. In this case the event in our immediate neighbourhood was the advance of the left

Brigade of the 46th Division, but the clouds of smoke from our own trenches and from those of the attacking troops, combined with the vapour and dust from the bursting shells, made even this movement very hard to follow. It was, however, apparent to us that the smoke cloud put up at 3-30 p.m., to cover a renewal of the attack on the left, was ineffective. Probably it was found impossible to arrange it effectively in the stress of battle ; moreover, what wind there was, was not then in the right direction. It had been a day of intense heat and of strenuous fighting against a resolute resistance, and in this part of the field, at any rate, the action seemed to die out during the afternoon.

Our own part in this first phase of the historic battle was naturally a minor one. The German defensive fire was directed almost entirely upon the fronts of the attacking Divisions, and our loss was only one killed (Private Wilson) and Second-Lieutenant Denley and six men wounded. At night-fall a strong patrol, under Brocksopp, searched the ground between the opposing lines, bombed a listening post opposite our front, and returned without encountering any opposition.

Unusual quiet marked the 2nd July in this sector, and only the thunderous rumblings and mutterings to the south indicated that the struggle was still in progress in the region of Albert, and on the French front. The 46th and 56th Divisions had now withdrawn to the positions they occupied before their advance, and an uncanny silence succeeded to the noise and turmoil of the last week.

We had now been sixteen days in the trenches, and on the 3rd were relieved by the 5th (Territorial) Battalion Lincoln Regiment, 138th Brigade, 46th Division. Although it was not known at the time, we were saying good-bye for ever to this sector of the front where we had spent so many months, and which, with its "rest" villages, must always be full of memories to those who served there.

That night was passed at Bienvillers, and on the morning of the 4th the Battalion marched to Halloy\* (via St. Amand, Hénu, and Pas) in a downpour of rain, arriving, thoroughly

\*Sketch 1.

drenched, at 3-30 p.m. The remainder of the Brigade was also billeted here, and the congestion was great.

On the 5th July the Division was broken up, the 111th and 112th Brigades going to reinforce the 34th Division, about Albert, and the 110th (Leicester) Brigade to the 21st Division in the same region. These arrangements finally did away with the original 37th Division, as, although it was subsequently reorganized, the 110th Brigade never returned. I understand that the 21st Division had never seen a brigade like it, and fell in love with it at first sight. This was natural, as even in our Division the Leicester Brigade was counted a very good one.

The rupture was a blow to us all. The Division was very efficient, and, in its own opinion, was far more suitable for a break-through than a break-up.

After standing in the streets of Halloy for two and a half hours, waiting for the motor lorries, my procession moved off at 8-30 a.m., on the 6th July, passed through Amiens, and reached Mellincourt\* at 4 p.m., where it encamped on a slope west of the village. The place was crowded with troops, and as the transport did not arrive till after nightfall, those who went in search of food, and they were many, found that it had long since been eaten up. At 11 p.m. Rooke and I attended a conference, at which General I. Williams (34th Division) explained to Battalion Commanders the arrangements for supporting Rowley's 56th Brigade in its attack south of La Boisselle, at 7-30 a.m. on the following day (7th July). The conference broke up after midnight, when the audience returned to their respective billets or camps. The necessary orders were then issued, and at 3-30 a.m. Lieutenants Jenkins, Stalker, Vokins, and Horton left camp to carry out a reconnaissance of the forward British line near La Boisselle,† and to select sites for the storage of bombs and other necessities for the attacking infantry.

We followed them at 5-30 a.m., and moving by the secondary road between Millencourt and Albert, and through the deserted streets and by the Cathedral with its falling

\*Sketch 1.

†Sketch 4.



Virgin, which, as I suppose was the case with everyone who passed there, seemed about to come crashing down on one's head, arrived about 7 a.m. on the ridge called Tara-Usna, at the moment when the British and French artillery were opening drum-fire on the enemy's positions at, and south-east of, the village of Ovillers-la-Boisselle, the area of the forthcoming attack.\*

Here, two Companies were employed in the service of bomb-carrying for the 19th Division, whilst the rest of the Battalion took ground on the Western slopes of the ridge and in the trenches that had recently been vacated by the advancing troops. Prisoners were arriving in numbers, both wounded and unwounded, and were surrendering freely to any man or parties of men that happened to be on duty in front of us. Many of them were in a noticeably nervous and shaky condition, and came forward holding out presents to our people, presumably as bribes against the ill-treatment which they had been told to expect. Others, particularly the officers, strutted along with a ludicrous and entirely Prussian-like air of indifference, quite out of keeping with their stupid faces and dirty condition. One could feel little sympathy with these braves, and some big French artillerymen who were standing by looked very much as if they would have liked to have eaten them up. Our own men were invariably kind to their prisoners; but no comparison between their attitude and the stern, but correct, bearing of our Allies, is possible, as the respective conditions were in no way alike. If the fairest provinces of England had been laid waste, her women violated, and her industries ruined, it is very doubtful whether her sons would have patted the violator on the back and have called him "Fritz"!

Reports as to the successful progress of the attack were coming in and there appeared to be no immediate prospect of the Battalion's services being required. A day of great heat was followed by a night of torrential rain. At 8 p.m. the 23rd Division was to attack Contalmaison, in conjunction with an assault by the 17th Division against the trench-system known as "The Quadrangle." At the same time the 68th

\*Sketch 4.





Brigade was to attack Bailiff Wood, whilst the 19th Division consolidated its positions won during the day. With the issue of these orders came instructions for us to be ready to support the 23rd Division. Fortunately no further development occurred. Contalmaison was about two miles distant, the terrain quite unknown to anyone in the Battalion, and these factors, in addition to the heavy rain, were all against successful night operations over quagmires, and against a determined resistance.

At midnight, Brocksopp's and Shewring's companies were ordered to occupy a recently-won work in the German line, known as "Heligoland."\* This they did, installing themselves in the muddy much-battered position just before dawn. The remainder of the Battalion passed the night on the Tara-Usna Ridge. The latter and the Albert-Pozières Road, bisecting it, now came under desultory shell-fire; some casualties resulted, but the stores of bombs and other warlike material that bordered the road were untouched.

Whilst sitting out the night in a dripping, splinter-proof erection, we received a visit from an elderly-looking Colonel, who was anxious to be guided to a position on the ridge, from which he was to deliver an assault against some position at day-break on the morrow. As it was within a few hours of that time, we gave him what help we could, and Davie conducted him, in the rain and darkness, to what we gathered from his rather imperfect description to be the jumping-off place for his assault. The objective of his attack, the force making it, the assembly positions, and so on, were, according to his account, so vague, that I have often wondered what became of this unhappy old gentleman and his men.

Late on the morning of the 8th July we received orders to relieve the 38th Brigade, 19th Division, in the positions between La Boisselle and Contalmaison taken in the previous day's fighting. Little being indisposed, his duties as Adjutant were taken over by Hart, who with the Company Commanders now made a reconnaissance of the new line preparatory to its occupation.

In accordance with the custom prevailing at this time, the

\*Sketch 4.

number of officers going into battle was not to exceed twenty per Battalion, and a proportion of selected N.C.O.'s was kept back for similar reasons. Seconds-in-Command of Companies and of the Battalion were included in these reserves, which, under Rooke, were left with the transport in Albert, where their stay was relieved of its monotony by a hostile shelling of the town, occasioning several narrow escapes.

At 8-45 p.m., on a fine evening, the Battalion passed the south end of the Ridge, crossed the old front line, and thence up the "Sausage Valley" into the battle zone proper. Night fell as the Companies, moving independently, entered the low ground, where the dead lay, marking the line of the recent attacks. The enemy's artillery searching the valley up which we moved, together with the fact that the ground, much cut up by shell-fire, had been made additionally heavy by the recent rains, delayed our progress, and it was late before the relief was effected.

The front ran roughly along the Contalmaison-La Boisselle Road, facing north, with the right refused and fronting Bailiff Wood, which, with the village of Contalmaison, was still held by the enemy. The 6th Bedfordshire, on our right, continued the line to the south, the 8th East Lancashire being in support. A Brigade of the 34th Division was operating on the left.

Some lively shelling was in progress as Hart and I stumbled over the torn and sodden country in quest of the Companies, and dawn had broken before we had properly made out the dispositions. In the dim light we had seen figures moving *across* our front from west to east; these were found to be elements of the 111th Brigade, which were establishing themselves in an evacuated German trench running almost at right angles to, and connected with, the line that we occupied. The already congested state of the Battalion, coupled with its complete absence of self-support, was further accentuated by the arrival of these troops, so that I withdrew two Companies into Battalion reserve, whilst "D" Company moved into the evacuated German trench, in touch with the 111th Brigade. The Battalion, in consequence, now faced rather east than north.

Headquarters was established about 300 yards south-west of the line in an extensive dug-out, yesterday the battle-centre of a German Regimental Commander. Two stories deep, and fitted up in the most complete and elaborate way with all modern conveniences, and the "usual offices," it must at one time have been a luxurious abode. It was capable of holding about eighty men; these had lived in the upper stories, and their clothing and equipment littered the rooms. Several had been captured before they were able to get out, and a large dead German was on one of the beds. The whole place was in a very dirty state, and the electric lighting apparatus had been put out of gear. Down below, the wine cupboards had evidently received a thorough overhaul, and bed-clothes and French literature of a frisky nature were strewn about. One of the two entrances had been crushed in by our guns; but otherwise the building was in first-rate condition. Here we installed the first-aid post, the Headquarter Signallers and Orderlies, and a section of the Brigade Machine Gun Company.

Patrols were at once pushed out to feel the front, one of Routh's Company taking three prisoners, and a like number of field-guns, besides several useful maps and plans, one showing the defences of Orvillers, a village lying a mile to the north-west, and which was still holding out determinedly.

During the day (9th) our position came under heavy hostile artillery fire. A small detachment left in charge of the captured guns was threatened with envelopment by infantry, and was withdrawn; and as no appliances were at hand to assist in bringing in the guns (which were in pits) they were left where they were. After the fall of Contalmaison one, if not all of them, was recovered. The bombardment was most severe on the refused flank held by Routh's Company, and Second-Lieutenants Jenkins, Horton, Alabaster, and Barnwell were wounded. The behaviour of all ranks was admirable under this ordeal. They were not in the least shaken, preserved a complete sang-froid, and all those to whom I spoke only expressed a desire to advance against the enemy. The cover from fire was quite inadequate, but the losses, under the circumstances, were not heavy. During these

three days they amounted to ten officers and 160 other ranks.

The 10th was a day of orders and incidents. At 1-30 a.m. the first order arrived to the effect that "strong patrols" were to be pushed forward to X16 (something or other), there to consolidate their positions. This was an advance into the blue, and as the platoons on arrival at "the blue" were to stay there, arrangements had to be made for the carriage and supply of water, food, ammunition, bombs, etc. By the time this had been done, and the scheme explained to the officers concerned, who were scattered all over the country, daylight had arrived, and the performance was no longer feasible.

At 4-30 p.m. the 69th Brigade assembled in our trenches, and launched an attack against Contalmaison from the West. The village had successfully resisted several previous assaults, but now taken in flank and under an intense concentration of artillery fire it rapidly succumbed. An attempt at counter attack by the Prussian Guard was bloodily repulsed, and the disordered elements of that force were caught by the Lewis guns of Routh's Company as they emerged in flight from the outskirts of the village. By 6-30 p.m. Contalmaison was solidly in the hands of the 69th Brigade, and at the same time an order came for us to assist them in its capture.\*

On the receipt of fresh orders to proceed with the pushing out of the strong patrols, previously mentioned, Shewring's Company advanced at 6-30 p.m. with this object. The instructions said that a Battalion of the 111th Brigade would be simultaneously and similarly engaged on our left, and that the manœuvre aimed at the subsequent readjustment of the line in conformity with the advance made. Routh, who had made a study of the ground, accompanied Shewring, and two platoons of Brocksopp's Company were told off to assist in

\*Mr. D. T. Curtin, in a conversation with a Member of the Reichstag, reports that the latter said: "If I wanted to learn the truth I should go out to Potsdam, and see the arrival of the wounded men of the famous Prussian Guard, who had, he said, a terrible experience at the hands of the English at Contalmaison on the 10th July."—*The Times*, 9th October, 1916.

the consolidation. The movement was met by heavy machine-gun and rifle fire, both in front and from the left flank. All the officers were at once put out of action, Routh, Shewring,\* and Webb being wounded and Kempsey-Bourne killed. The fire from the front was at an estimated range of 150 to 200 yards, that from the flank came from the direction of Owillers-la-Boisselle. The fire was at once returned; but as the advance of the Battalion of the 111th Brigade on the left had not begun, and the flanks of our small force were entirely unprotected and exposed to envelopment, our men were unable to effect their object, and were withdrawn.

At a later hour on the same evening Pretor-Pinney led his Battalion of the Rifle Brigade on a similar object. The operation, gallantly carried out, was fiercely contested, and according to the account of an officer who took part in it, the losses of the Battalion were heavy, and it was forced to retire. To merit success these two affairs required careful preparation and mutual co-operation, the one with the other; but carried out as they were, they fulfilled neither of these conditions, and so courted failure from the outset.

The advance of the Rifles had caused the line on Millard's left to be temporarily without troops. Noticing this and seeing that their subsequent retirement was being closely pressed by the enemy, Second-Lieutenant Vokins, who was in command at that point, sent a few men to hold the empty position and collecting what others he could, promptly attacked the advancing Germans, driving them back with loss, and taking a prisoner. His timely action and initiative did much to restore the situation. He was unfortunately killed in the retaliatory bombardment that opened on our line, and with him fell young Critchley, the Bombing Officer, Company Sergeant-Major Canton, and others of Millard's Company, on which the weight of this fire came.

At 7.35 p.m. more orders arrived; this time to seize Contalmaison Wood, in conjunction with a Battalion of the 111th Brigade, which was to co-operate by attacking it from

\*Shewring's conduct and leading, on this occasion, were very noticeable, and he had a narrow escape from death; his tie was completely cut in half by a bullet, just below the knot, and his field-glasses were smashed on his waist-belt.



the north-west (a line of advance which would have brought them up against the front just attacked by the 13th Rifle Brigade). I hadn't unravelled the mystery of assembling the scattered elements of my command, preparatory to this exploit, when another order came to cancel it.

The spacious nature of Battalion Headquarters was well tested on this day. Evening saw it packed with wounded officers and men ; these were then joined first by two officers of the 13th Rifle Brigade, survivors of their recent attack ; then by Stourton (Brigade-Major) bringing fresh orders (which were shortly cancelled), and finally by a vulgar-looking and talkative German, the spoil of Millard's Company. On the top of this mass of humanity came the fumes of lachrymatory gas-shells, which the enemy was exploding in the neighbourhood. The position of the dug-out was of course well known to him, and the attention he gave it made the carriage and care of the wounded a matter of considerable risk. At the same time, it was the only really safe refuge, and the best had to be made of it.

The arrangements for the evacuation of casualties *from* the Regimental Aid Post were not, at this time, perfect, and the work of Russell (the doctor) and his stretcher-bearers, in the face of these difficulties, was exceptionally praiseworthy. Because of the congestion of cases, many men had to be attended to in the open, where the shelling was often dangerously close ; but these brave men allowed nothing to hinder them in the performance of their duties and continued their work without pause or hurry till their patients had either been evacuated or were safely placed under cover.

At 3-30 a.m. (11th July) the Battalion was relieved by Cobbold's 10th Loyal North Lancashire, and returned to the Tara-Usna Ridge, where it became the Brigade Reserve. For a loss of about 50 per cent. of its officers and 160 of other ranks, it had little to show on the credit side. It had neither advanced nor given ground. Nevertheless its steadfast bearing and ability to accept losses with equanimity, even with cheerfulness, proved its readiness to do all, and more, that might be required of it, and showed that reliance upon its military virtues had been in every way justified.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE COMBAT AT POZIÈRES\* (15th AUGUST, 1916).

On the Tara-Usna Ridge. We become Supporting Battalion to the Brigade—Orders for the Attack on Pozzières—The Advance is Stopped by Heavy Fire—"A" Company Loses all its Officers—Millard withdrawn and sent to the Exposed Flank—The Attack is renewed at 6 p.m., but without success—Hostile Attempt at Counter-attack is crushed—The Fight is broken off—Gallantry of Private Ward—Heavy Casualties—Comparisons with former Losses.

THE Battalion now bivouacked on the reverse slope of the Tara-Usna Ridge, but during the afternoon it was driven to take cover in trenches, as the enemy shelled the position with 5.9 guns, blowing up a Company's cooker with four of the men employed there, and rendering the neighbourhood "unhealthy" as a resort. Headquarters went through a modified version of this experience during the night, which was also marked by intense artillery activity in the region of Thiépval.

In the late evening of the 13th July we relieved the 8th East Lancashire as the supporting Battalion, and occupied the German trenches, adjacent to, and in rear of, those that we had recently vacated. At 3 a.m. on the 14th an intense bombardment heralded the attack of the 15th and 13th Corps on the line Longueval-Bazentin-le-Petit, forming a wonderful picture of the might and destructive power of modern war. From our position we were able to see much of the artillery action; besides, it was quite feasible to walk about above ground in a way strange to people accustomed to long months of trench-warfare. I think this feeling of freedom was the most pleasant of any that we experienced in the battle!

For the most part, officers and men lived in recesses dug out of the sides of the communication trenches that they now

\*Sketch 5.

occupied. There were only a few dug-outs available, and of these Hart, Russell, and I had one about 15-ft. by 5-ft.

Later in the morning our guns turned their attention to Pozières, which lay a mile north of us, and when visiting McKay (8th East Lancashire) he told me that during the night his patrols had succeeded in reaching the south-west outskirts of the village. Probably they mistook the trenches, some distance this side of the lisière, for the actual village line, as subsequent events showed that it required something like a Division to get into the place, and that the vigilance of the enemy would hardly have tolerated the presence of a patrol there.

In the small hours of the morning of the 15th July we were told that the Brigade would attack Pozières at 9-20 a.m. After repeating the "glad tidings" to the Company Commanders, I went to McKay's dug-out, where the arrangements were further discussed by the Battalion Commanders at a Brigade Conference. The dispositions made were as follows :

The 8th East Lancashire was to lead, and was to clear that part of the village south of the Albert-Pozières Road. It was to be followed by the 6th Bedfordshire, which was to account for the area north of the road. The 11th Royal Warwickshire was to carry tools, and assist the leading Battalions to consolidate and hold the ground gained. It followed the 6th Bedfordshire. The 10th Loyal North Lancashire was to carry bombs, stores, etc., for the three leading Battalions. All Battalions were to enter the village by the trench marked T (see sketch), each Battalion having two Companies in front line, followed by two in support. The flanks of Battalions, during the advance, were to be marked by the Contalmaison-Pozières and Bailiff Wood-Pozières Roads, on the right and left respectively. The attack was to be preceded by a heavy artillery bombardment of the objective. It was also notified that the 1st Division would co-operate by engaging the enemy to the east of the village, whilst the 23rd Division would develop a bombing attack against its west defences.

After receiving these instructions I rejoined the Battalion,

which began at once to move forward, keeping under cover of the communication trenches till the open ground was reached, north-west of Bailiff Wood. As it emerged into the open, the tail of the Battalion in front was seen just ahead of it; there was thus ample time for deployment, the function of the battalion being to hold and consolidate the ground gained by the two attacking Battalions.

The advance up to this point had not been opposed; but as the troops came over the crest above the Chalk Pit, they were met by heavy and sustained machine-gun fire at decisive ranges. So fierce and accurate was this fire that the Brigade became immobilised on its narrow frontage, and the three leading Battalions, which had pressed forward with great boldness, became to a great extent inter-mixed. Nevertheless, they staunchly held their ground, and, although suffering appreciable losses from artillery and machine-gun fire, showed no signs of wavering and maintained a firm front.

Brocksopp's Company moving by the east edge of Contalmaison Wood was at once involved in the fight, and in its determined advance, soon lost both its officers and many of its men. Brocksopp was severely wounded whilst leading a rush, and French, his Second-in-Command, was hit at about the same time. The Command then devolved upon Sergeant W. J. Moon\*, a very young but able soldier, as the Company-Sergeant-Major (Freeman) had closely followed his Captain, and now lay with him well in front of the line, and in a position from which any movement during daylight was impossible.

On the left Stalker and Bowen were wounded within the first few minutes. Half the Company officers were thus early out of action, and only one Captain (Millard) remained. In this position on the left the congestion of units was very marked, as it was here that the bulk of the attacking troops had massed on the restricted front of their advance.

During these happenings, Battalion Headquarters, whilst crossing the open south of the Chalk Pit, had been driven to the cover of a shell-hole by flanking machine-gun fire from

\*For his service in the field he was promoted to Commissioned rank in the regiment on the 31st October, 1917.

the direction of Owillers-la-Boisselle, and by artillery fire from the north. Vacating this shelter, we again established ourselves successively in other shell-holes, before finally coming to rest in a disused trench east of Contalmaison Wood\*. Here Harrison's Signallers quickly put us in touch with Brigade Headquarters, communication with the Companies being maintained by orderlies.

It was soon apparent that the right flank of the attack was very much in the air, nothing having been seen, or heard, of the 1st Division, whose action on that side had been promised. At 2-30 p.m. I accordingly sent the following message to Millard: "If you can evacuate your present position behind the 8th E.L. and 6th Bedford without observation from the enemy, do so, and move via valley which runs round south edge of Contalmaison Wood where my Headquarters are (X.16.a.9.7)." Millard effected this change of position successfully, and was then told to move up the valley to Brocksopp's exposed flank. During his withdrawal an agitated voice was heard through our telephone complaining to "Brigade" that "Warwicks are retiring," and that their action had a depressing effect upon the spectators. I called through, in interruption of this conversation, to calm the speaker and explain the situation. He was in the Chalk Pit, with most of the other Battalion Commanders, and it appeared that Millard's progress past their fastness had caused germs of "gloom and despondency" to pervade the assemblage.

Later on Hart and I walked over to this Chalk Pit, and found there a great gathering. A steady stream of wounded was constantly arriving, and either receiving attention or being directed further to the rear; in addition, the bulk of the 10th Loyal North Lancashire was stationed here, ready to move forward with the tools and other accessories, as they might be required by the leading Battalions.

Information now arrived that the heavy artillery would renew the bombardment at 5 p.m., and that the infantry

\*Contalmaison Wood was a wood only in name. It was a small and much-battered spinney, and I saw few trees or remnants of trees over 6-ft. in height.

(i.e., 112th Brigade and 10th Royal Fusiliers) were to attack again at 6 p.m. The signal for the advance was to be the firing of a red rocket.

As the hour approached, the antics of a man on a ridge, about 300 yards away, were eagerly watched from the Chalk Pit. Punctually at 6 p.m. this individual apparently fired the signal, as a puff of smoke, about 2 feet high, ran along the ground for a few yards and then disappeared. As this performance was repeated the spectators became greatly excited; every second's delay was of value to the enemy in enabling him to man his machine-guns, for, in accordance with the foolish custom then prevailing, the bombardment of the front line ceased at the hour arranged for the infantry advance. As quickly as possible a rocket was obtained in the Chalk Pit and fired from there; but valuable time had been lost, and the rising of our men was met by a devastating fire at the closest ranges, and in spite of the most determined efforts, all attempts to force the defences of the village failed once more.

In this assault all units behaved with a gallantry of which many instances are on record. Second-Lieutenant Onslow forced his way to within a short distance of the German wire, but, with the few men that were able to follow him, and in face of the deadly machine-gun fire that met him, was unable to penetrate the line. On the right, Millard at the head of "D" Company led his men with equal dash and determination, and, charging over the advanced hostile trenches, fell severely wounded at their head. But all attempts to storm the village were without avail, and the Brigade became again immobilised on the ground it had won at such a cost.

Emboldened, probably, by his success, the enemy now pushed troops from the north-east outskirts, in an attempt to turn our right flank. The movement was promptly met by "A" Company and crushed at its birth, a result largely due to the bold and accurate handling of his Lewis gun by Lance-Corporal Hitchman, who was unfortunately shot through the head and killed at the moment of his success.

It was now at least obvious that a spear-head attack, on such a narrow frontage, with both flanks in the air, was bound

to fail in the face of the unshaken fire of massed machine-guns. Orders were accordingly given to the 10th Loyal North Lancashire to take over the ground gained, whilst the remainder of the Brigade returned to the positions held prior to the attack. These movements were carried out after nightfall, and without interference from the enemy. Well into the small hours of the morning (night 15th-16th July) the stretcher-bearers were busy evacuating the severely wounded, and removing them to the comparative shelter of the cross-roads, north of Bailiff Wood. Here at 1 a.m. we found Russell attending to cases by the fitful light of a candle, whilst around him lay the wounded and dying. Occasionally the scene would be lit up by the flashes of exploding shells as they fell in the vicinity of this temporary hospital, but the work went on quietly and expeditiously, and when Hart and I left at 2 a.m. most of the casualties had been evacuated to the rear.

Conspicuous, among many brave deeds, was the work of Private Ward, a Regimental stretcher-bearer. To places far in advance of the general line of battle and marked only by the bodies of the very foremost stormers, places, too, where all ordinary movement would have been impossible, this intrepid man penetrated, crawling on his hands and knees or at full length. Possessed of immense strength, he was able to carry or drag many of his comrades to a more sheltered position, and thus saved many lives. He witnessed, so he told me, several acts of German brutality, such as the shooting of our wounded at close quarters, and being himself but a rough man, with the rude sense of justice of the ancients, it was doubtless unfortunate for *their* wounded, who lay about amongst our own, that this powerful and relentless soldier should have been an eye-witness of the treacherous conduct of their fellow-countrymen! Recommended for the "immediate award" of the Distinguished Conduct Medal, Ward never lived to receive it. Nearly a month later, and before the intricate and involved machinery that surrounded the grant of "immediate" awards had had time to operate, he was killed in the act of removing a badly-wounded man to the shelter of the dressing station; thus dying, as he had

lived, a fine example of the fearless band of regimental stretcher-bearers, who were always to be found where the greatest danger lay.

In this engagement the casualties in the Battalion amounted to five officers\* and 270 other ranks, percentages of 41.6 and 46.5 respectively. I have no record of the losses in the 6th Bedfordshire, 8th East Lancashire, and 10th Royal Fusiliers ; but as they opened the attack, their losses were probably heavier, whereas those of the 10th Loyal North Lancashire, which was not heavily engaged, would be lighter. A conservative estimate of the total losses would, then, be about 1,200, or say 40 per cent. for the five Battalions.

In comparing losses it is interesting to note that students of military history, and soldiers themselves, generally regarded the seriousness, or otherwise, of the losses sustained, from the standpoint of contemporary fighting only. Thus, Sir John Adye, in his "Recollections of a Military Life," talks of the losses of the British Army at the storming of the heights of the Alma (20th September, 1854) as "very severe" ; although according to his estimates, they only amounted to just over 7 per cent. of the forces engaged, and in no Regiment, he says, did they exceed 239 in killed and wounded. In the Battle of Inkerman, where, he says, "the English losses were very serious," the percentage was much higher, amounting to about twenty-nine. He gives the casualties for this action as 2,614, and included in them are no less than eight Generals !

It must be remembered that the British Army in the Crimea had not been seriously engaged since the Napoleonic wars, and forty years of comparative peace had dulled the recollection of the fierce fights and heavy casualties of former days. The colonial wars that followed the Crimea had a similar effect, so that when, after the lapse of another forty years, the Army became involved, on a large scale, in South Africa, we find a British General breaking off an action (Colenso, 1899) after a loss of less than 1,200 of all ranks, or something under 8 per cent. of his total strength.

Writing on this subject a German authority says : "Good troops which unexpectedly get into a difficult situation

\*Only twelve officers were engaged.



(as for example the British Brigade of Highlanders at Magersfontein) and which have been trained to look upon heavy losses as unavoidable, will be capable of enduring a loss of 25 per cent. in the course of a battle without going to pieces, and without discontinuing the attack." But the lessons of the Russo-Japanese War warned all thinking soldiers to be prepared to accept losses far in excess of that estimate, and the Great War has shown that good troops will endure the heaviest losses without becoming disorganized.

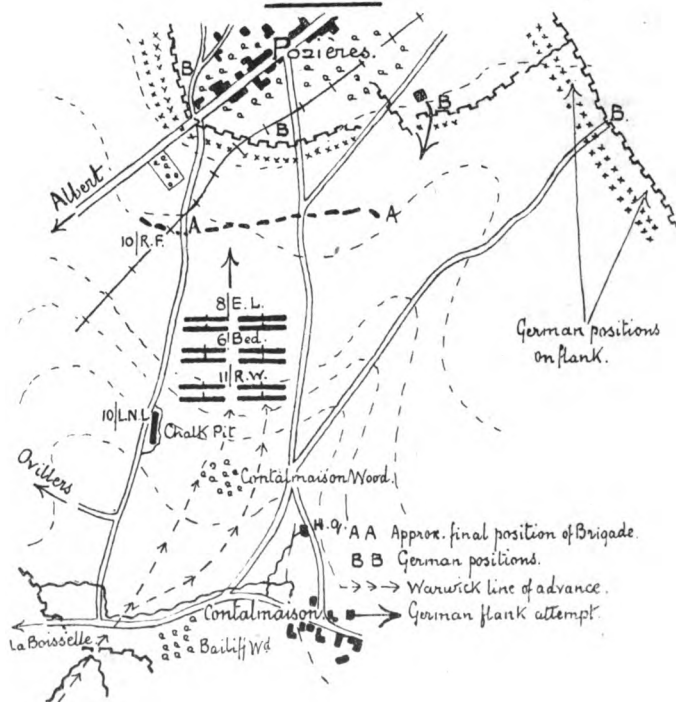
However, in spite of its losses the fighting round the Chalk Pit was but an incident in the far-flung battle that raged along the Franco-British front, and the Official Communiqué only recorded of it that "East of Ovillers a further advance has been made and our troops have fought their way to the outskirts of Pozières."

I can fitly conclude this chapter with an extract from a circular letter from the Brigade Commander, dated 16th July, 1916:

"The operations in which this Brigade took a prominent part yesterday (15th July, 1916) were, in my opinion, of the most difficult and trying nature that any troops could have been called upon to carry out. To attack a position across 1,000 yards of open country, to then remain on the battlefield from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. consolidating the ground gained, under accurate machine-gun and rifle fire, and exposed to the enemy's artillery, and, finally, to issue from this hastily constructed position for a second assault, is a task which would try veteran troops, and which calls for the highest form of courage and tenacity. These operations were rendered still more difficult owing to the hasty preparations which the situation demanded. I am filled with admiration and respect for the officers and men who have performed this feat of arms. The losses incurred by the Brigade have been serious, but a line has been secured from which new troops will be able to capture Pozières, and this Brigade will have contributed largely to the capture of this place. Our conduct has won the admiration of both Corps and Divisional Commanders, etc., etc."

# The Fight at Pozieres

## 15<sup>th</sup> July 1916.



Scale 1 inch to 550 yards.

SKETCH 5.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME—*Continued.*

We wander about—Billeted at La Houssoye—Death of General Williams—In reserve at Bécourt Wood, which we are forced to evacuate—The 34th Divisional Front—Mametz Wood—We approach Bazentin-le-Petit—Description of the Position—The “Intermediate Line.”

ON the afternoon of the 16th July we were relieved by a Battalion of the 5th Fusiliers, and returned to Albert, where we billeted near the wrecked railway station. Here we rested for the 17th; but at midnight (17th-18th) were ordered to the trench system, called “Heligoland,” in the old German line south-east of La Boisselle, as support to the 68th Brigade, which was said to be about to attack Pozières. On arrival there at 2-45 a.m., and after some difficulty in getting into touch with this unit, we were told that no attack was to take place, whereupon we returned to Albert, after a night spent in wandering aimlessly about, like d’Erlon at Quatre Bras.

On the following afternoon we left Albert and marched to Bresle, a village off the main Amiens-Albert Road, and about five miles west-south-west of the latter town. Here we went into billets for the night, and on the 20th arrived at La Houssoye.\*

At this place the men were accommodated in barns, but the arrangements for the officers were most indifferent, and only by the exercise of much strong language and an abundant display of Prussianism was I able to get even a decent roof for myself and my staff.

The next few days were spent in re-fitting, the training of men as Lewis gunners, bombers, etc., marching, and general reorganization. Since our arrival in the Albert sector our

\*Sketch 1.

losses had amounted to fifteen officers and about 450 other ranks ; moreover, from the 18th June up to the time of our arrival at La Houssoye, the Battalion had been either in trenches, continually on the move, or engaged in battle. As a result many of the best and most highly trained men, as, for instance Bombers, Signallers, and Lewis Gunners, were no longer with us, and it was necessary to fill the gaps as soon as possible. Consequently, the most had to be made of this period, and reinforcements were urgently required. These latter, to the number of about 380, arrived on the 24th July—all private soldiers. Nine subaltern officers joined on the following day.

On the 23rd I attended at Warloy the funeral of Major-General Ingouville-Williams, 34th Division, who had been killed at Mametz Wood. A large number of officers, both from the Division and from units outside it, were present on the occasion. He had once visited me at Contalmaison, and, as far as I can remember, was quite alone. But I believe he was of that type, and very fearless.

The Brigade was inspected by the Corps Commander,\* on the 25th, in a field near Behencourt, and on the 30th left La Houssoye, and was billeted for the night at Bresle. On the evening of the 31st July it moved forward via Millencourt and Albert to a position in reserve about Bécourt Wood. The Battalion itself occupied the wood, and I was conducted by a guide and with all proper ceremony to an erection about 2-ft. high, and composed of several small branches resting on sticks, which, he said, constituted Battalion Headquarters. It was a fine warm night, and a matter of indifference to us all where we rested, and I don't remember whether I made any remarks to the gentleman on the matter of my choosing my own Headquarters. I daresay I did, but, as it was pitch dark and about 1 a.m., he possibly lost himself in the wood before I had finished.

Château Bécourt and the wood adjoining it lie within the trench system comprised in the old British front line.† They stand on the south slopes of the spur, which runs down

\*Sir William Pulteney, Commanding 3rd Corps.

†Sketch 4.

from La Boisselle, and are separated from the old fire and support trenches by the narrow gorge, whose upper and wider reaches are known as "The Sausage Valley." Here the tide of battle had gathered and swelled, to burst with violence against the German positions opposite. At the date of our arrival this tide was beating up against the German resistance, four miles away, whilst the traffic rolled continuously onward, and past the Château, raising clouds of dust, which hung about in the hot, sultry air, and mantled everybody and everything with garments of white.

Neither the Château nor the wood had suffered much from their proximity to the fighting. The former was now in use as a hospital, and many of its rooms were in good condition, whilst the leafy shade of the wood surrounding it offered a pleasant shelter from the broiling sun and dusty thoroughfares. It was, however, better to look at than to live in, for at about 10 a.m., whilst the men lay about cleaning their rifles, shaving, and engaged in other peaceful duties, and just as my servant (Bowden) with my belongings on his back, was accompanying me in a search for a better house, the ominous sound of an advancing shell, followed almost immediately by a shattering explosion, turned the peaceful scene into one of confusion and uproar. The first shell was quickly followed by three or four more, and all burst right amongst the men as they lay about. Several trenches ran through the wood, and a rush was made for their cover, but not before fifty-one men had been killed or wounded, among the latter being Second-Lieutenants Allam and Morson, who had recently joined, and the Chaplain (Roberts). More than half the Battalion had never been under fire before, and were fresh from England, and one would rather that their baptism had been more gradual. This was an essentially brusque and sudden one.

No time was lost in getting them away, and, after searching about, we came upon a line of deep trenches skirting the lower and eastern edge of the wood extensive enough to hold everyone, and here they remained in reasonable comfort and security till the 5th. Headquarters found a disused erection in the bank of one of the branch roads.

When not otherwise engaged many of us spent our time in examining the captured German defences, in particular those of the crushed and battered village of Fricourt, the scene of especially heavy fighting in the opening days of the battle. During the nights our artillery often displayed great activity, and after dinner it was customary to mount the opposite rise, where a wonderful view could be had of the line of bursting shells. Intermixed with these, rockets of all colours were continually ascending, some of which broke into great clouds of sparks which fell like golden rain. Several heavy howitzers, domiciled in our vicinity, were glad to add their voices to the clamour, but they interested us less, partly because they brought about reprisal fire, and partly (from my point of view) because at each discharge they blew out the candle in my lodging.

On the afternoon of the 3rd an ammunition waggon, after a preliminary period spent in the desultory and intermittent discharge of small arm ammunition, finally blew itself up with all its load of bombs, causing a regular stampede among the mass of horses and mules that were watering at the troughs near by. The dust kicked up by these animals was always a nuisance, but on this occasion it beat all records! Their riders, always half-dressed and untidy-looking creatures, still seemed to get hold of certain luxuries that were denied to the ever-moving infantry. I particularly noticed a bath of great size and depth that always seemed to have an occupant. As we were momentarily expecting to go into battle a bath like that was a great luxury, and the half-dressed people never saw it again, at least not during our time at Bécourt Wood.

On the 3rd August the 34th Division held a front from about the western edge of High Wood to a line of trenches running east and west, and about 300 yards north of Bazentin-le-Petit. Two Battalions, 111th Brigade, and two of the 101st Brigade, were in front line, with their supports in the woods of Mametz and Bazentin-le-Petit. The 6th Bedfordshire and 8th East Lancashire, of our Brigade, were in reserve near Bottom Wood, the 10th North Lancashire and ourselves being for the present in bivouac about Bécourt Wood.

My diary records that on the night 2nd-3rd August the 101st Brigade made a successful advance, but was subsequently withdrawn, as it was found impossible to dig a communication trench to connect with them.

On the 5th I went forward with Hart, via the Quadrangle Trench and Mametz Wood, to arrange about our relief of the 11th Suffolk, which was entrenched on the southern outskirts of Bazentin-le-Petit Wood and also in the north-western lisière of Mametz Wood. The latter wood was much shattered and consisted only of smashed, torn, and leafless trees. Débris of every description encumbered its recesses, and accentuated the mass of undergrowth that impeded all passage through it. A wide ride traversed it from north to south, and there were several cross-rides which could be utilized. Before the battle, both it and the woods of Bazentin-le-Petit and le-Grand must have offered welcome shade and cover to the German, and the broken Russian and other guns that lay about were proof that he made good use of its concealment up to the end.

The Battalion left Bécourt by half-platoons on the afternoon of the 6th August, and established itself in its new positions. Two Companies, with Battalion Headquarters, were in the trench skirting Bazentin Wood, the remaining companies being in Mametz Wood. The 10th Loyal North Lancashire occupied the north-eastern border of the wood, whilst the 6th Bedfordshire and 8th East Lancashire held the trenches north of Bazentin-le-Petit.

The ground we occupied included that portion of the German defences that was taken by assault on the night 13th-14th July, and was the actual scene of the attack of the Leicester Brigade, whose gallantry was so conspicuous a feature of that action. The space dividing Bazentin and Mametz Woods was ploughed and furrowed by shell-fire and in many places legs and arms were to be seen protruding from the ground, and the smell was most disagreeable. Lying about were great quantities of rifles and equipment, and of these we soon constituted a formidable heap. Most of the rifles were in first-rate condition; but it was, at that time, customary for a man, directly he was wounded, to cast aside



his rifle and equipment before proceeding to the rear. This wasteful and foolish habit was the cause of much trouble, and I am glad to say that steps were afterwards taken to stop it.

An advanced platoon, under Second-Lieutenant Thorowgood, occupied a work, called a "strong point," off the north-western corner of Bazentin Wood, with a post consisting of six men, under Sergeant Moon, rather to the north of it. Both these posts were in rear of the battle line proper.

During the night 7th-8th August, and on the following day, our positions in and about Mametz Wood were heavily shelled, and several casualties occurred. A Second-Lieutenant, who had only recently joined, was killed in the afternoon, and Barwell's Company, to which he belonged, was moved to a position in prolongation of the line occupied by the two foremost Companies; Graham's ("B") Company following it on the 9th. The shelling of the wood, and of the ground about the depot of stores at the corner of it, continued during the day, but, as the result of this move, without further casualties to the Battalion, though another of Barwell's subalterns had to be evacuated owing to shell-shock during the night.

At 7-30 p.m. on the 10th August we relieved the 6th Bedfordshire in the line north of the village, and the 10th Loyal North Lancashire took ground to our right, in relief of the 8th East Lancashire. Chambers' and Wilfrid Little's Companies were in front line, with Graham's in immediate support; Barwell's men lay just north of Bazentin Wood, rather to the left rear of the Battalion front.

The British troops were now approaching the summit of the great ridge, whose southern slopes are marked by the villages of Bazentin-le-Petit, Pozières, and Thiépval. To the east of this ridge, and acting as a bastion to it, stands a conspicuous feature, its western crest crowned by the Bois des Fourreaux, called by the English High Wood. Fierce fighting still raged for the possession of this obstacle, whose skeleton trees could be plainly seen dominating for miles the southern approaches to the ridge. From here the

German line ran westward, at an average distance of two or three hundred yards from our own. Just north of Bazentin a curious position ensued, for the enemy now held, for a matter of 500 yards, a line in prolongation, and west, of the British front line trenches.\* This hostile stretch was known as the "Intermediate Line," and was connected with his main defences, called the "Switch Line," by a communication trench at its western limit. The 10th Loyal North Lancashire held the front to the east of the "Intermediate Line," i.e., in touch with the German left, whilst the Royal Warwickshire faced it, at distances varying from 150 to 230 yards, being connected with Cobbold's Battalion by a communication trench. On our left was a Battalion of Scottish Rifles.

The trenches were not of a permanent character, such as existed in the old front lines, but were deep enough for all purposes. The weather for some time had been very hot and rainless, and though this resulted in an increase of smells, especially in the vicinity of the "Intermediate Line," where the dead lay thickly in the neutral ground, it was of benefit in the upkeep of the parapets and fire-steps, which would have easily succumbed to moisture.

The North Lancashire Headquarters and our own shared a deep dug-out, of German construction, in a trench abutting on the eastern border of the village. There were two entrances six yards apart. What cooking there was took place on the stairs, and, according to my diary, "the flies and heat were appalling." Being a Boche dwelling, the doors naturally faced north, and on the day following our arrival a shell landed there, killing the Regimental Sergeant-Major of the North Lancashire.

\*See Sketch 6.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE FIGHT AT BAZENTIN-LE-PETIT.\*

A "Strong Point"—Barwell loses all his Officers—Smart work of the 10th North Lancashire—The "Tin Hat"—Preparations for the attack of the Intermediate Line—The "Russian Sap"—The Enemy, being warned, is prepared for our attack—The Red Rocket—Gallant assault of "A" Company—The left Company loses direction—The difficulty in maintaining connection—Casualties.

SOON after taking over the line, Barwell's Company, which since Hannescamps days had invariably suffered disproportionately from shell-fire, was heavily bombarded by 8-in. howitzers. The fire was directed chiefly against that part of his position where a so-called "strong point" was occupied by a platoon under Second-Lieutenant Ward. This post lay just west of the cross-roads north of the village, and situated as it was within a few hundred yards of the front trenches, was nothing more than a travesty, which, as interpreted by Collins' Pocket Dictionary, signifies "a burlesque imitation of a work." The instructions received as to its occupation were that it was to be held to the last. Unfortunately no opportunity presented itself of relieving the garrison, most of whom, with their gallant young Commander, were buried in the débris that followed the early obliteration of the post.

In consequence of this, and of the exposed position of the rest of the Company, Barwell was told to move it to trenches in the northern portion of Bazentin Wood, where he would at least be out of view, and more conveniently situated if required. During the same night his last remaining subaltern, Vaughton,† who had been blown up, but not actually hit,

\*Sketch 6.

†Second-Lieutenant S. G. Vaughton.

by a shell, had to be evacuated owing to shock. Barwell thus lost his four Platoon Commanders in the course of about twenty-four hours.

At 2-30 a.m. on the night 10th-11th Cobbold's Battalion made a very smart and original capture of about 200 yards of that part of the "Intermediate Line" that lay in prolongation of its left flank. Led by their Bombing Officer, the Battalion Bombers rushed along the back of the hostile trench, throwing in their bombs as they ran. At the same time the infantry stormers moving along its front dropped in, successively, behind the exploding grenades, and made good the line. So quickly and expeditiously was the business completed that the main German forces were in ignorance of their loss, and dawn found their ration parties arriving over the open ground in rear in blissful unconsciousness of the reception that awaited them. I had discussed the manœuvre beforehand with Cobbold. It possessed the possibilities of failure, to which all such original conceptions are liable, but it succeeded admirably, and with quite insignificant loss to the attackers.

When visiting the line with Rooke and Jones (Lewis Gun Officer), on the morning of the 11th, we found that Graham's Company had been heavily shelled, and that several men had been temporarily buried; it was accordingly moved to a position further back, and out of observation from High Wood. It may appear strange that such obvious changes as this, and the move of Barwell's Company to the shelter of Bazentin Wood, were not effected sooner, but it was customary and natural for a relieving Battalion to take over a line as it was held by the outgoing unit, so that alterations in the dispositions had necessarily to take place later, either in the light of after events, or to conform to other tactical ideas. It is beyond question that the habit of placing supporting troops close up to the firing line was a common one throughout the Army, and it was due as much to the false teachings, which were the outcome of the early British and German methods of position warfare, as to anything else.

Harrison\*, the Signalling Officer, was wounded in the

\*Second-Lieutenant K. M. Harrison.

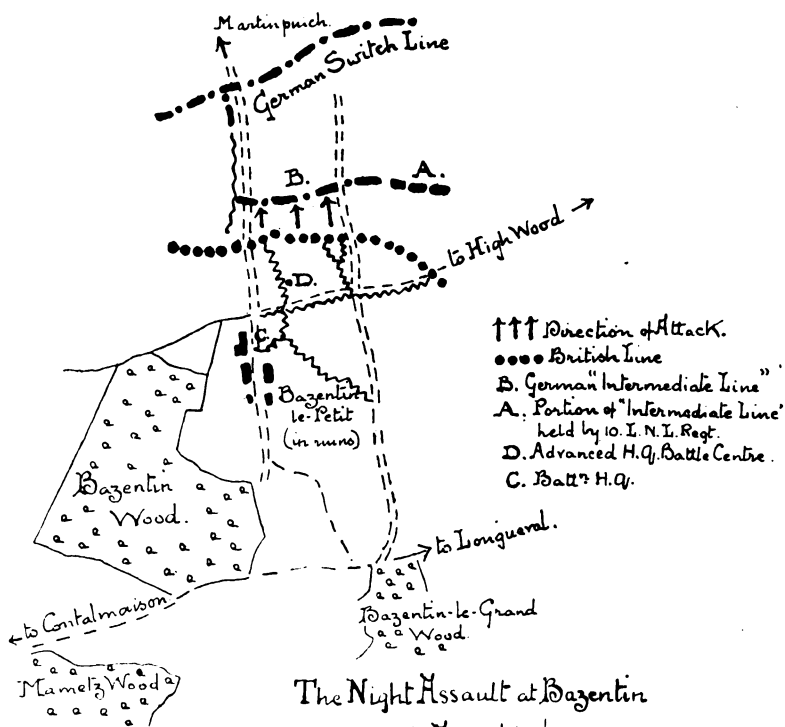
afternoon. His life was undoubtedly saved by his steel hat taking the full force of the shell-splinters. One would like to know just how many men are now walking about who would have been in their graves but for this hideous but effective head-dress. As for its designer, only the prayers of the countless thousands who owe their present happiness to this hat can save him from being haunted to his death by the spirits of all the artists and lovers of the beautiful that have ever existed. I remember when it first arrived at the front the difficulty we had in making the men understand that it was not to be used as a cooking pot or as an article of bedroom furniture; but in the course of a few months they thoroughly appreciated its real value. In addition to its other uses it provided a great means for attracting attention when, for instance, one wished to talk to someone in front and couldn't make oneself heard through the noise. In such a case a blow on the hat with a stick, or rifle, opened the conversation, and all went well. Soon after its reception in France, I met a minor General, in my lines, who was wearing one, although it was not at that time in general use. He was a good-looking man and appeared less grotesque than one would have imagined, and when I asked him why he did it, he told me that a certain other General of high rank was expected on a visit to the trenches, and that as he was a pushing forceful person, and in the habit of emphasizing his points by blows upon the head, he (the minor General) thought it advisable to be ready armed for the occasion.

Harrison was a bright and painstaking young officer, whose springy step and imperturbable mien never left him, even under the most adverse conditions. He was succeeded by Lieut. A. A. Milne, now a well-known writer.

Having had an order to attack the remaining portion of the German "Intermediate Line" on the following night, I called a meeting of the Company Commanders and discussed with them my plans for the operation. It had been suggested that we should imitate Cobbold's successful manœuvre, and attack from the flank, but for several reasons I considered a direct attack preferable and arranged accordingly.

The British troops holding this section had already made





## The Night Assault at Bazentin

12th August 1916.

SKETCH 6.

two attempts to effect a lodgment in the line opposite ; but, with the exception of that just mentioned, without success. The objective was roughly 250 yards in width, and varied in distance from our line, from 150 yards on our left to about 200 yards on our right. The intervening ground rose slightly, in parts, especially about the right centre, and prevented the opposing lines from having a direct view throughout their length, and it was much cut up by shell fire.

The remainder of the day passed without incident, but at night the artillery on both sides displayed their customary activity.

On the 12th there was a final conference with the officers making the attack, the dispositions for which were shortly as follows :

- (a) The attack was to be delivered by "A" and "C" Companies, each with two platoons in front line, followed, at a distance of twenty-five yards by their remaining two platoons, "A" Company (Captain Chambers) directing. The two Companies, in their extension, would cover the space between the Crucifix-Martinpuich and Bazentin-Martinpuich Roads, which, it was hoped, would provide an additional safeguard against a possible loss of direction.
- (b) Graham's ("B") Company, was to hold the front vacated by Little's men, and was to be prepared to advance in support of the attack if required. In addition, it was to detail four sections to follow the attacking Companies, for purposes of connection between them and our front line, and for the supply of bombs and wire for the protection of the captured trench.
- (c) Barwell's ("D") Company was to take over the front vacated by "A" Company.
- (d) The artillery support, which was arranged for by higher authority, and by which our movements were to be controlled, was as follows :
  - (i) At 10-30 p.m. (zero hour) light artillery was to shrapnel "no-man's land" (50 yards south of the objective) for 30 seconds.



- (ii) At 10-30½ p.m. it would lift on to the enemy's trench till 10-33 p.m., when
- (iii) It would again lift and put down a barrage about 150 yards north of the trench. This barrage to last about one hour.
- (e) In conformity with this action, the attacking Companies were directed to be outside their trenches by 10-30 p.m. (zero hour). They were to move forward as close to the barrage as possible, and when it lifted to the north side of the trench the assault was to be delivered.
- (f) Bombing groups were formed on the right and left flanks of the attack. The principal one, that on the left, under the Bombing Officer, Second-Lieutenant Onslow, M.C., had for its special mission the blocking of the enemy's trench communicating with his main (switch) line. There were other bombing groups about the centres of Companies, and every soldier carried a bomb in each of his two hip-pockets.
- (g) Every man carried 170 rounds of ammunition, with the exception of the men composing the bombing groups, who only carried fifty.
- (h) The supporting platoons also carried tools, and every man carried two empty sandbags.
- (i) The Loyal North Lancashire promised to co-operate by engaging the enemy's attention at the point where their line joined his, and by the fire of Lewis guns against a possible attempt at reinforcement from the north, whilst the Scottish Rifle Battalion, of the 15th Division, brought his main communication trench under fire from a sap-head that commanded it.

These comprised the general arrangements for the attack. There were, of course, others, connected with the employment of the Lewis guns, Signals, etc., etc., but it is unnecessary to mention them here.

In order to connect our line with the captured trench an Engineer Officer with a party of his men arrived on the 12th, for the purpose of constructing a "Russian sap." I am unable to remember the details of this construction; but,

shortly, it consisted in blowing up with one bang, so to speak, a length of straight trench from our line to that of the enemy. I remember that water formed an essential part of the working requirements, as several requests for its supply were received ; but a Battalion in battle doesn't specialize in this liquid, so we couldn't be of much assistance. In the event, our friends were unable to make much headway, and later in the evening the officer departed for further assistance. He never returned, and it was rumoured that he had stumbled upon an artillery barrage and got hurt, but I hope it was only a rumour.

To facilitate and improve the communications from Battalion Headquarters, slits, or feathers, were cut in the main communication trench to accommodate the Second-in-Command (Rooke), two Headquarter orderlies, and two signallers with a telephone. These slits, which constituted an advanced battle centre, were placed about 100 yards from the trench occupied by Little's Company. In addition, Milne's signallers had done all that was possible to perfect and ensure the maintenance of telephonic communication by the use of the " ladder " system on all the lines.

In the late afternoon the objective was severely shelled by our heavy guns. I at once asked the Brigade to stop this bombardment. Not only would it render the trench uninhabitable to our men, should they succeed in taking it, but it was a plain intimation to the Germans that we contemplated some action against them in the near future. In fact it clearly eliminated the factor of surprise, which is of vital importance in night operations. The Brigade were, however, unable to do anything. The bombardment, they said, was arranged by people above them, and was part of a plan in the operations that were to be carried out by the 15th and an Anzac Division that night.

It was at 9 p.m., and so an hour and a half before " zero " hour, that the enemy (as the result of our warning) started a systematic and accurate shelling of our position, directing his fire particularly on our front line and trenches of communication. Rooke, who had left to take up his position in the advanced battle centre (previously mentioned), was forced back by the accurate fire of shrapnel, that swept the ground

and trench between it and Battalion Headquarters. Graham's Company, from support, was fast approaching its assembly point in Little's line, when it was overtaken by the same storm; but, although he was himself more than once blown off his feet, he succeeded with great gallantry and perseverance in getting his men into their positions. Once there, they escaped the full force of the fire, which continued to be chiefly directed against the ground behind, and in a lesser degree against the front occupied by the right ("A") Company.

This state of things continued till 10-30 p.m., at which hour the prevailing clamour was increased by the rolling drum-fire of the British guns heralding the infantry advance.

It is difficult to present a clear and accurate picture of all that followed, even on this small corner of the battlefield. For one thing, the night was exceedingly dark, and for another, of the five officers that actually formed the storming party, only one now survives. It is to him (Captain Wilfrid Little) that I owe the story of what the left Company did that night; but even that story is incomplete, as he was himself severely wounded at a critical stage of the operations.

It is not to be denied that the hostile bombardment to which the assaulting companies had been subjected for more than an hour previous to the advance had somewhat shaken their composure. It was to many of the men their first experience of the kind, and at least half of them had not been three weeks in the country. The delivery of an assault under such conditions was a test that would have tried veteran troops; but the bravery and devotion of the officers, and the steady valour and example of the old remnants of the original Battalion, provided the necessary impetus, and punctually to time the leading line of stormers left the trenches and advanced against the enemy.

At the outset of their forward movement they suffered little loss, and as the first wave of the right Company approached the slight rise of ground that intervened between them and the hostile trench, a red rocket was seen to soar into the air. An eye-witness of this incident told me that he and those of his comrades who were able to notice it amid the turmoil of surrounding events were puzzled at its appearance,

for it seemed to rise but a few yards from them, though at the moment they were, to the best of their belief, still some distance from the German line. And this was actually the case. When returning, later, over the same ground, my informant, who had marked the spot, found a deep pit-like excavation, partly open at the top. The time was not then suitable for loitering and he did not examine it carefully ; but it was undoubtedly the temporary home of the rocket-man, and lay midway between the opposing lines, being so sited that whilst its occupant could observe our trench, he was himself unseen, and because of his central position, reasonably clear of our own and the hostile artillery barrages. Nevertheless, he was certainly a stout and determined soldier, for he dared much and ran great risks.

Coming now within the zone of the hostile artillery and machine-gun fire, which swept across the front of the objective, men began to fall fast. The gallant Chambers\* was one of the first to be hit, and fell severely wounded at the head of his Company. Vigor†, a brave and dashing young officer, whose first battle it was, was wounded in the hand, but scorning to relinquish the fight, continued to press forward, and was last seen, at the head of a small and devoted band, leading a charge against the enemy. He fell almost upon the parapet of the enemy's trench, and, in the words of Napier, "No man died that night with more glory—yet many died, and there was much glory."

Some of the right Company undoubtedly succeeded in forcing their way into the German line ; but the weight and impetus of their attack had broken under the severity of the hostile barrage fire, and the failure of "C" Company to engage his right enabled the enemy to concentrate his energies at the point of greatest danger, and it is certain that these bold spirits were all either killed or captured.

On the left, Little's first line had advanced with equal steadiness and devotion. It was ably led by Lieut. Roberts, who was on the extreme right in order to keep up the connection with "A" Company which was directing. In view of

\*Captain S. W. G. Chambers, killed in action 23rd November, 1917.

†Second-Lieutenant W. P. Vigor.

the fact that a road and a communication trench ran northwards, and on the left flank of Little's advance, he had asked whether he could move by this flank, instead of entirely by his right, in touch with "A." As his extension on the left of "A" Company would in any case have placed his outer flank on the road and communication trench in question, and further, as the darkness of the night and the confusion due to the enemy's curtain-fire might accentuate the difficulty of inter-Company connection, I readily assented to his proposal. The group of bombers, under Onslow, were accordingly made responsible for direction on this flank.

The advance continued with great regularity till it occurred to Little, who was in rear of the centre, that his Company should now be coming to grips with the enemy ; but as this did not happen, he passed along the line of men towards the left. Here he found that Onslow's group of bombers had *crossed* the communication trench, marking the left flank, and were consequently heading north-west across the front of the Battalion of Scottish Rifles, and away from the objective. Conforming to this movement, the bulk of the Company had trended, also, in that direction. The hostile artillery and machine-gun fire had by this time assumed great intensity ; but, making the men lie down, Little was in the act of rectifying the direction by compass, when a shell burst above him, mortally wounding Onslow. This very gallant young officer only survived his wound for a short time. He had proved his worth at Pozières, and it is only justice to him to say that the road and trench, by which he was to advance, and over which he had unfortunately passed, were by no manner of means easy of location in the darkness and confusion of the assault. On the other hand, had he been able to maintain the right direction, it is more than probable that the objective would have been carried, and that he himself, by his well-known courage and resolution, would have largely contributed to the success.

Collecting what men he could, and intensely anxious to rectify the mistake, Little now led them afresh against the enemy. The hostile fire was at the time at the height of its fury, but, in spite of it, the forward movement appeared to

make progress. But his gallant attempt to put matters right was without success, for he was himself severely wounded shortly afterwards.

Meanwhile, Roberts\* on the right had kept in close touch with "A" Company, but word being passed along for the men to march by the *left*, all except a few of those in his immediate neighbourhood gradually edged away towards the outer flank. He was killed at a short distance from the German line. He, too, had only lately joined the Battalion, and those who knew him spoke in high terms of his courage and resolution.

The telephone wires connecting Battalion Headquarters with the advanced battle centre and with the front line had been cut early in the operation, some of them before the commencement of the attack. The site of the advanced battle centre was partially demolished; several signallers were wounded and their instrument smashed. Privates Hunt and Saunders (Headquarter orderlies), who occupied an adjacent slit, were both hit, the latter being killed. He had enlisted with his father, a steady good soldier, who had fallen in a recent engagement, after doing duty for several months as a Regimental barber. It was one of many occasions where father and son served together, and the country can never do too much for the dependents of such true patriots.

With considerable difficulty, and at great risk, Private Hunt managed to get to Battalion Headquarters. He brought the information, which, he said, he obtained from Graham, that the attacking Companies were in no need of support or assistance. This was very welcome news, and it was naturally inferred that the attack had succeeded. These hopes, however, were soon dashed by the coming of other messengers with more exact information as to the real course of events; and Rooke's arrival on the scene confirmed the story as I have just related it.

The casualties in this affair were unfortunately heavy. Of the five officers that actually led the attack, three were killed and two severely wounded, and Graham, who commanded the supporting Company, had to be evacuated owing to shock.

\*Second-Lieutenant L. Hilton Roberts.

The other casualties amounted to about 150, principally from amongst the two assaulting Companies.

During the evening, a Company of the 9th (Pioneer) Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment had come up to assist in the consolidation of the captured trench. Its services were, however, not required, but it had the disagreeable experience of being heavily pounded by hostile artillery as it lay in the support line awaiting the course of events.

If the story has taken rather long in the telling, the whole affair (from 10-30 p.m.) only lasted a few minutes. The enemy was well prepared and had been sufficiently warned ; in spite of which, had fortune been a little more friendly, those few minutes would have seen us in possession of his line. But one must allow him the credit of a very stout defence.

## CHAPTER XV.

The Morning after the Fight—Telephones—We leave the Albert Sector—Casualties in the Battle—Arrival at Longpré—Night March to Neuf Berquin—Re-join 37th Division at Divion-Brouay—Relieve 49th Brigade at Mazingarbe and Loos—Bantam Regiments—Bomb *v.* Rifle—In the Line at Loos—Relieved by 76th Brigade—March to La Comté.

OWING principally to Rooke's indefatigable efforts, the line soon assumed its normal state. Not quite so quickly its normal *shape*, as the trenches had suffered considerably from the fire, and several men had been buried in the fairway of the main communication trench.

The wild night had given way to a morning of comparative calm. Many of the men leaned on the parapets and gazed across at the German, who, on his side, seemed generally engaged in the same pursuit. Between them, the ground was thickly covered with the dead of the recent battles and with many of our wounded of last night. In former wars the latter would have been collected, and the former buried, under a flag of truce; but there was little of the chivalry and courtesies of war about this contest. However, our stretcher-bearers and several other daring spirits were not deterred by considerations of any sort from boldly going to the relief of any officer or man who showed signs of life, and all such were carried to the shelter of our trenches, strange to say without any attempt at molestation on the enemy's part. With that adaptability for which the British are celebrated, the great majority of our recruits had quickly settled down after the rough work of the night, going about their daily duties with much sang-froid, and showing little sign that anything out of the common had been happening.

The remainder of the day passed uneventfully. During the night there was a mild repetition of artillery activity,



which continued during the 14th. It was mainly noteworthy because our own trenches became, in parts, the receptacle for our own shells ! Heated discussions over the telephone failed to put a stop to it, but as a large man with two carrier-pigeons was domiciled in my dug-out, I eventually sent a message, by his birds, to the Division, when the nuisance abated. I don't know what one would have done without the telephone ; but, like most other things, it had its drawbacks, and as the operator at the Brigade end of the line was usually deaf (judging by the constant shouts of "Hallo, Brigade !" that preceded all our messages) it was often a perfect curse. Once, at Hannescamps, when engaged upon a rather important study, its persistent ringing became so unbearable that it had to be brought down (with a gum-boot—range about four yards) until I had finished what I had been trying to do.

In the evening we were relieved by the 10th Lincoln Regiment (Lieutenant-Colonel Somerset) and moved to the northern and north-eastern borders of that evil place, Mametz Wood. Here we occupied trenches and some German dug-outs, formerly the Headquarters of one of their heavy batteries and marked by two smashed Russian howitzers.

At 6.45 p.m. on the 15th August our place was taken by the 8th Royal Berkshire (Lieutenant-Colonel Bartlett), 1st Brigade. A Battalion of this Brigade subsequently attacked the "Intermediate Trench," but, we were informed, without success. However, the British advance eventually left it isolated and its garrison was forced to surrender, after putting up as stiff a fight as did their compatriots at Ovillers-la-Boisselle.

On relief, we proceeded, accompanied by a hostile airplane, through the tangled desolation of Mametz Wood, by the "Quadrangle" system of trenches, Fricourt Farm, to Bécourt Wood, where the Battalion bivouacked. Headquarters were fortunate enough to get a small room in the Château itself, which was no more knocked about than when we last saw it, and still had many quite respectable apartments.

At 5 a.m. on the following day (16th August) we marched

via Albert to La Houssoye, and took over the billets that we previously occupied. Our French host and his wife expressed much pleasure at our safe return. This worthy couple owned a large dog, whose existence must have been a burden to him during the Somme battles. The dull throbbing sound of the guns upset him dreadfully, and drove him to shelter in retired spots, where he lay looking the picture of gloom and misery. One wonders what his feelings became when the dull throbs developed into a continual roar as the tide of battle surged around the village in the summer of 1918.

On the 17th Graham and Gettings, with several N.C.O.'s and men who had been wounded in the early days of the offensive, returned to duty. Graham\* told me he had been given the choice of evacuation to England or of rejoining his Battalion, as the accommodation in the base and other hospitals was then very limited. He elected to return to duty; but a rest of three or four days, after his exceedingly trying experiences of the 12th and 13th, was totally inadequate and the first opportunity was taken of detailing him and several men for light duty at the base.

On the following afternoon we entrained at Fréchincourt for Longpré. The 8th East Lancashire and elements of the 9th (Pioneer) North Staffordshire accompanied us.

With its departure from Fréchincourt the Battalion left the zone of the Somme Battles. Since its entry into the region about Albert, its casualties had amounted to (1) Officers—killed 7, wounded 24, total 31; (2) other ranks—killed 87, wounded 524, missing 61 (mostly killed), sick 55 (largely shell-shock), total 727. In the assault made by the right Company at Bazentin-le-Petit, it is probable that a few men succeeded in entering the German line, where they would have been outnumbered and taken. This handful would not likely have exceeded ten in number. Of the sixty-one men reported missing, fifty must thus be accounted killed. As usual, we had very little sickness, so that of the "sick" cases, two-thirds, or say thirty-five, should be added to the numbers

\*Lieutenant F. N. Graham, killed in 1917.

shown as wounded. The number of killed to wounded is, roughly, in the proportion of one to four, which approximates the general normal of battles; but it is a ratio that rises and falls considerably with the intensity or otherwise of the fighting. The proportion of officer casualties (31) to that of the other ranks (727) will appear small in the light of the early actions of the war, and of former wars. But this is not actually the case. The Battalion never went into battle with its full complement of officers, and Hart and myself were the only two that escaped being hit among those that were in action throughout this period.

We reached Longpré at 11 p.m. It was quite a nice old town. Billeted there for the 19th, and on the 20th entrained for Neuf Berquin. After meandering slowly along via Boulogne to Hazebrouck, we reached Bailleul at 9 p.m., and marched thence through Oulstersteen and Vieux Berquin to the village of Neuf Berquin (about eight miles).<sup>\*</sup> We were once more in the land of pavé roads, and among the flat fields of French-Flanders; but all appeared peaceful and rural, and the villagers were most friendly. The hand of war had not yet marred these quiet scenes, which, before many months had passed, were to be engulfed in the flood of the German offensive of 1918. We were now in the area of the 2nd Army.

On the following day Robinson went on leave and I took over the Brigade. Someone has to answer for another's absence; but to me it was always a most unpleasant function. The Brigade Staff were most affable, and were excellent company at all times, especially in the days when the French interpreter, Professor Mauss, was a member of their mess. They were always well, sometimes luxuriously, housed and fed, and work for me ran on easy lines. What made it unpleasant was that one left one's Battalion at just about the time when one wanted to be with it, i.e., just as it was reorganizing and getting into form after a spell in the front line, as Robinson, very correctly, selected only the periods when his people were out of the line to go on leave.

<sup>\*</sup>Sketch 1.

Professor Mauss was a most entertaining man, and, like many of his race, was a culinary expert, especially in the matter of "hors d'œuvres." He and Courtney were the light comedians of the mess. Courtney, previously referred to as the *fidus Achates* of the 112th Brigade Headquarters, was indispensable. One of his duties was, apparently, to instruct successive Staff Captains; but whatever he did he seemed to do well. Stourton, the tireless and efficient Brigade-Major, had little time for recreation, and I seldom remember him taking any leave. Stuart-Wortley, a Yeomanry officer, a little shorter than Chang-yu-Sing, the Chinese giant, was the Staff Captain at this period; and Sturt, the Chaplain and whilom Mess President, completed the household.

On the same afternoon (21st August) orders were received that the 111th Brigade and ourselves were to entrain on the morrow for Divion and rejoin the 37th Division, with headquarters at Brouay.\* This was very good news. Nothing is more annoying than to be broken up and attached to all sorts of strange formations, in the manner of a kind of lost legion, or no-man's child. No one knows anything about you when you arrive, and you know nothing about them, and it would be hard to say who is the most upset.

At 1 p.m. on the 22nd the infantry of the Brigade entrained at La Gorque, Brigade Headquarters, with part of the transport, the Trench-Mortar Battery and the Machine Gun Company entraining at Lestrem. We were now in the area of the 1st Army, and Beyts† (my old Adjutant), who was on its General Staff, motored over to see me. A Divisional car met us at Fouquières, and took us to Divion, where a nice château was placed at our disposal. The Brigade itself was billeted at Brouay, about two and a half miles away. This is a mining district, and not a particularly beautiful one. Divisional Headquarters, where we lunched on the 23rd, occupied an imposing building (I think the Mairie) in the centre of the town.

\*Sketch 1.

† Killed in action (5th October, 1917) when commanding 15th (Service) Battalion Durham Light Infantry.

On the afternoon of the 24th, the Brigade marched to Mazingarbe, where it billeted. Stourton and I motored to the Headquarters of the 49th Brigade (Brigadier-General Leveson-Gower), which we were to relieve in the Loos sector on the following day. The 49th Brigade formed part of Hickie's 16th (Irish) Division, which, I think, had held this sector since its arrival in France in the early part of the year. Leveson-Gower showed me round some of the reserve trenches. In the time at our disposal it was quite impossible to visit the front lines. It would have taken something like seven hours.

For that night we slept in a rather dilapidated, but large, house, and in the morning studied the local defence scheme. The sector appeared to be a quiet one. The gentle Saxons were our immediate opponents, and I fancy that, like ourselves, they were just out of the hurly-burly of the Somme, and were anxious for some repose. Their predecessors, on the other hand, had considerably annoyed the 16th Division by frequent, and, I understood, very effective, gas attacks, so that gas-gongs, and all the other paraphernalia connected with them, were greatly in evidence.

At 1-30 p.m. on that day the relief started, the 8th East Lancashire and 6th Bedfordshire taking over the front line, with my own people, under Rooke, in support in what was called "The Village Line"—presumably because it was the furthest from any village—with one Company pushed forward to a trench known as "Gun Trench." The 10th North Lancashire were in reserve at Mazingarbe.\*

On the following morning, at 9-30 a.m., Stourton (who had long legs and never seemed to get tired) started with me for a tour of the line. For the first part of our journey, that is the route to the "Village Line," we were able to move comfortably in the open. The "Village Line" marked the site of the British trenches, as they existed before the Loos attack of September, 1915, and was on the ridge that lay between Loos and the country west of it. Progress in the open was now no longer possible, and we descended

\*Sketch 1.

the slope through seemingly interminable and stuffy communication trenches till we reached McKay's burrow in the Loose-La Bassée Road, where we took some refreshment. McKay was a Scot, and with the hospitable and far-seeing instincts of his race, could always be relied upon in such an emergency.

Loos itself was not included in our line, but our communications bordered it on the north. Our centre faced generally the Bois Hugo and Puits 14bis, and the left (held by the 6th Bedfordshire) covered and encircled Chalk Pit Wood. All these places had been the scene of much fighting during the previous September. The distance between the opposing front lines averaged 250 yards. The soil was chalk, and excavations were naturally very obvious to both sides. A good deal of burrowing was, and had been, in progress, and parts of the trenches were heaped with sandbags, full of the chalk that had been brought up by the tunnellers. The line was quiet during our visit, except that some "oil-cans," or engines of that sort, were being lobbed over about the Chalk Pit; and after seeing Edwards (Commanding 6th Bedfordshire) we retraced our steps, reaching Mazingarbe at 5-30 p.m., eight hours from the time when we started out.

At the moment we were attached to Ruggles-Brise's (40th) Division, then the latest New Army formation to arrive in France. It originally consisted, entirely, of what were called "Bantam" Battalions; but on taking the field I gathered that only one Brigade of these small men remained with it. Subsequently, when returning from a night visit to my front line, preceded by my orderly (Mee), a Regular soldier with rather a dominating manner, and a tall upstanding man to boot, I heard him lecturing someone (evidently a sentry) as to the proper and effective method of challenging people who approached his post. It seems that we had wandered into the lines of the Bantam Brigade, then holding Loos, and I came up, to find Mee, surrounded by a small Corporal and three little men, all, apparently, much impressed by this large, strange person with the raucous voice. They seemed nice little people, and took it all in very good part,

although midnight lectures by private soldiers of other regiments were by no means usual, even in this war.

I think it was a day or two after our arrival here that we were told that the artillery contemplated giving the enemy a "knock about" during the night. I believe they did; but after our experiences of drum-fire bombardments, we didn't realize that what we heard was anything more than very mild activity. Everything in life goes by comparison, and the "knock about" in question would probably have been called "intense" about a year earlier.

James Thain, my late Bombing Officer, rejoined at this time. When recovered from his wound he had been seized upon by the home authorities and made Chief Instructor of a Grenade School in the New Forest. Soon after his arrival he was again abducted, this time by the Divison, and made Commandant of their school. The cult of the bomb was now at the height of its fame. First extensively used in trench raids, its importance had not diminished as a result of the recent fighting on the Somme, where tactics were reduced to artillery bombardments, followed by an infantry rush (like a Trafalgar Square riot) into the smashed and obliterated position. I don't suppose that my Battalion fired more than five rounds per rifle during the whole time that it was in action in that region; for the simple reason that there was hardly anything, or anybody, at which to aim. On the other hand the stacks of bombs that covered the battlefield were prodigious. The result was that the stream of bomb enthusiasts had assumed the proportions of a flood, which, joined by the lesser stream of Lewis and Machine Gun enthusiasts, actually threatened to engulf the formidable body of musketry enthusiasts (or "fiends," as they were commonly called) that had long been paramount in the Army. Fortunately for everyone, the musketry fiends were able to keep their noses above the current, and backed by the powerful influence due to the traditional success that the rifle had always had when in the hands of the British infantry, and to the support of the calmer and older heads of the Army, they were *eventually* successful in damming the flood to their entire satisfaction. So much so that about a year

later, when I was at home, all the old Hythe "stunts" were in full swing again, and recruits were being told to "Assume the prone position," *not* to "lie down," and if asked at what part of a man they should aim, were to reply "At the lowest part of the central portion of his figure," any other reply, such as "at his feet" or "just below his knees," being anathema, and a certain indication that the whole system of training in the Regiment was bad, and that the complete defeat of the Allies on the battlefield was imminent.

Robinson having returned, I rejoined my Battalion in the "Village Line" at 9-30 a.m. on the 29th August, and at 4-30 p.m. took over the front held by McKay's East Lancashire, the 10th North Lancashire coming into line on our left.

The heat of the preceding days had been followed by much rain, and the water lay deep in portions of the communication trenches, and those in the front were sagging and tumbling about, covering the fairways with their slimy chalkiness. In a portion of the Headquarters dug-out a miniature cascade was falling from the roof, whilst a small burn purled merrily through the centre of the dungeon. We had still much to learn from the German in these matters.

Rooke and I spent some hours in touring the trenches. We found that there was a great deal to be done. In the meantime Thain had made a thorough inspection of the grenades that were stored in boxes, and kept in the front line. These bombs always required (but didn't always get) careful watching, as they soon deteriorated if uncared for, and the same must be said of the rockets and S.O.S. signals, which should never be kept *all together and exposed to rain?*

Three Companies held the front line, with one in support. This Company was occupying the reserve trench, of about 1,000 yards in length! Before anything else, this Gilbertian situation required attention. The enemy, though he nearly blew in Thain's dug-out after we had passed, still maintained his generally decorous behaviour. There were many rumours of mysterious underground noises; but they came to nothing, at least during *our* stay in the sector.

On the 31st August, Stubbs, 2nd Suffolk (76th Brigade, 3rd Division), who was to relieve us on the following day,



came on a visit. I afterwards ran across his Brigadier (Kentish) who, with Robinson, was nosing about in my front line. Later in the day Craven, C.R.A., a pleasant and accommodating officer, kindly acceded to my request for retaliation on the German, who with trench mortars and other weapons had been showing rather more spirit than was in keeping with his previous good conduct.

Hearing that the enemy's listening appliances were reputed to be very effective here, and having previously warned the Company Officer concerned (by orderly) to pay no attention to my telephone message, I made use of the instrument to give a lot of erroneous information as to movements and reliefs of which, I hope, the operator on the other side took a particular note, and sent to the proper authority.

The relief began at 5 p.m. on the 1st September. It was without incident, except for a collision between Russell (our doctor) and a live wire, which some idiot had erected, at about the height of a man's chest, across the open ground behind the "Village Line." Russell was hurled to the earth, and not till he had emptied my flask did he become composed enough to explain the situation.

We billeted for the night in Mazingarbe, and marched with Cobbold's Lancastrians at 7-30 the next morning for La Comté, via Barlin and Ranchicourt.\* Our short stay in the Loos sector had cost us few casualties. It had not originally been intended that the Brigade should go into action until it had been completely rested and reorganized after its engagements in the Albert region. We were now *en route* for the rest, and no more suitable and picturesque spot could have been selected than the charming village of La Comté, watered by a pretty chalk stream, and surrounded by gently undulating and well-wooded hills. We had the village to ourselves; the 10th North Lancashire was at Bergin, about a mile away; and the other Battalions were together somewhere else. The 8th Royal Highlanders marched out as we arrived. They were destined, so they said, for the Vimy area, and had been practising attacks (shown by marked trenches)

\*Sketch 1.

for the taking of the Ridge. They looked a clean, well set-up Battalion, and made a very good appearance.

Count Gleichen inspected the Battalion on the 5th, and congratulated it on its good work in battle. On the 9th the Corps Commander (Sir Henry Wilson) gave one of his very interesting (and amusing) lectures on the European situation. Those, and they were many, who expected to hear secrets were disappointed, for though he told us things that up till then *were* secrets, as far as we were concerned, there was nothing really confidential in the lecture, which was full of pungent wit and humour, and very human, which was its chief attraction. While the lecture was proceeding (it was held in the open) the distant rumbling of heavy artillery fire was plainly audible. This, Sir Henry said, marked a French action south of the Somme, of which he had received telephonic information from his friend General (now Marshal) Foch, so after a hurried tea he left by car for the French Headquarters.

## CHAPTER XVI.

Pleasant days at La Comté—Going on Leave—March to Compigny—Relieve "Howe" Battalion at Bully-Grenay, Angres Sector—"Immediate Awards"—War Honours—I bid farewell to my friends and return to England—After much gallant work the Battalion is broken up and amalgamated with other Warwick Battalions.

LIFE was pleasant at La Comté. The mornings and a small part of the afternoons were devoted to ordinary and special training, interspersed with lectures given either by the Adjutant, the Company Commanders, the medical and specialist officers, or by myself. The audience was expected and encouraged to criticize and ask questions; and as the lectures dealt with all aspects of the soldier's life in the field, they were, I am sure, helpful to everyone. Games and sports occupied the rest of the day, and a horse show arranged by the Brigade, and which was very well patronized, was the *pièce de résistance* of the period. At this show there was, in addition to horse races and jumping competitions, a parade of the regimental transports, which was won by the 6th Bedfordshire, with the Warwickshire a good second; but there was very little to choose between any of the teams.

One day a wire arrived from Southampton to say that Lieutenants Boucher, M.C., and Shewring were on their way to report at Rouen, and could we get them sent to us. After telephoning Brigade and asking them to get the Division to arrange this, we telegraphed to the Commandant, Rouen, asking him to send the officers to us on their arrival. They turned up two days later, much to everyone's surprise. We hadn't given our status, and Hart had merely signed the wire with his name. Whether it was his peremptory message, or the Divisional one, that worked the oracle is unknown; but in times like those the return of two capable young officers

to their own unit was as unusual as it was agreeable. More often than not they were diverted, at the Base, to any other place or Corps than their own.

On the 15th Rooke, the Regimental Sergeant-Major (Shear), and a private soldier, went on ten days' leave. To account for this exodus, it should be explained that three "leaves" had been granted to the Battalion—the usual number. For Battalion Commanders, and occasionally for other Field Officers, going on leave was made very comfortable. A car, from somewhere or other, could generally be got to take one either to Boulogne (as an exceptional case), or to some important railway junction, such as Doullens or Amiens, whence the rest of the journey was easy enough. On the other hand, junior officers and the rank and file were carried away in a large bus, which appeared to start, for choice, in the middle of the night. This conveyance, after cruising about through the various villages, picking up its quota of passengers, and waking up, at the same time, everyone within a mile of it, transferred its freight at some wayside station to a long heavily-laden train. The latter, which maintained an average speed of about a mile an hour, varied by long halts and much whistling, was calculated to reach its destination in sufficient time to allow passengers to be marched to some camp there to wait for another boat than the one just missed! Havre was the embarkation port for our people (except for Lieutenant-Colonels, who travelled by Boulogne) and the journey from Havre to Southampton was a long, uncomfortable, and crowded one. Not that I ever heard any grumbling about it. It was obvious that leave was a great privilege, and much greater inconveniences would have been cheerfully borne by those who took it.

On the 17th September orders arrived for the Brigade to relieve the 188th Brigade, 63rd (Naval) Division in the Angres sector on the 19th, as follows: 6th Bedfordshire and 8th East Lancashire in the line; ourselves in support at Bully-Grenay; 10th North Lancashire in reserve at Fosse 10.

We left our pleasant surrounding in a driving rain, and marched via Barlin to Compigny, a suburb of Hersin. On this day the reputations of some of the most celebrated

vendors of rain-proof coverings were damned for ever ! The men were accommodated for the night in huts, and the officers (at least some of them) in billets in the quite considerable town.

On the following morning (19th) we moved to Bully-Grenay, and relieved the "Howe" Battalion, 188th Brigade. Barwell's\* Company held a position called "Mechanic's Trench," in close support of the front Battalions. Boucher ("B") had two platoons at some workmen's cottages, called "Corons d'Aix," and the remainder were pushed forward to some dug-outs at a post called Pont de Cap. Battalion Headquarters and the other two Companies were billeted in Bully-Grenay, which is really the southern portion of the village of Grenay, and, like all the other places hereabouts, is a miner's village. For all that, it was a well-ordered place, with good, wide streets, and a fine church. With the exception of some houses, and especially of an estaminet on its eastern outskirts, it had been little damaged by shell-fire, and this in spite of the fact that a main communication trench to the front line started only about 200 yards from the principal street. Many of the inhabitants still remained, and children were always to be seen playing about the roads, noticeably near the "corons," or workmen's dwellings, which were a feature of the landscape in this neighbourhood. All the mining villages that I saw appear to have been built with great regard to the comfort of the people, and were not at all what one expected to see in a Black Country. Whether Lens, with its extensive suburbs of Liévin and Angres, was equally well planned, I can't say, as I never got nearer to it than the lines of trenches that overlooked it from the west.

French Colonial troops had probably once held this line, and some of the trenches were still known by such names as

\*Captain H. W. E. Barwell obtained the Military Cross and the Croix-de-Guerre in the November following. In July, 1917, he transferred to the Royal Flying Corps, after two years' continuous service in the trenches. He was recommended for a bar to his M.C. in March, 1918; but on the 25th of that month was reported missing and was presumed to have been killed in aerial combat on, or after, that date. He was an exceptionally modest and gallant officer.

"Morocco" (Maroc) and "Algiers"; but the more forward entrenchments had purely English names, and marked the limit of the Franco-British advance in the action called by us "The Battle of Loos." From the old line a wide view could be had of the enemy's foremost positions, as they ran south past the suburb of Angres, and up and along the famous Vimy Ridge. Due south stood the almost equally famous ridge of Notre Dame de Lorette, the scene of some of the fiercest fighting of the war, and still dotted with the bodies of the unburied dead of those days, when "furious Frank and fiery Hun" struggled for its mastery.

The Battalion being in support, Hart and I, on our daily round of duties, had many opportunities of studying the enemy's advanced parallels and of observing the trench-mortar activity which was continually going on, and in which our people were noticeably aggressive. The number of houses that were here massed together, and which constituted the suburb of Angres, served only to accentuate the emptiness of the scene, for never a sign of life did we see. Boucher (the Intelligence Officer) on the other hand, reported more than once that he had seen a woman hanging out washing from a house quite close to the front line; but suspicious as her (or his) presence might be, no one cared to give the order to fire.

On the 22nd Bobbie Russell (Medical Officer) left, on appointment to a base hospital at Rouen. He had been many months with the Battalion, had closely identified himself with all ranks, and had behaved with conspicuous bravery and devotion to the wounded on more than one occasion. His death, which occurred with tragic suddenness some months later, came as a blow to his many friends. He was relieved by Captain Allcock, R.A.M.C.

It was on the 24th September that Onslow's name appeared in the papers as having been awarded the Military Cross, for which he was recommended on the 17th July. As already shown, he was killed in action on the night of the 12th-13th August. It is much to be hoped that in the next war instances of valour that merit an "immediate award" (as it was facetiously termed) will be recognized as nearly "immediately"

as possible. No one expects to be made a Viscount, and to get a grant of £50,000 immediately, or even within a month or two ; but surely if a Battalion Commander's recommendation is supported by the Brigade and Divisional Commanders, the latter officer should have the power to award minor decorations on his own responsibility, and at once. The value of such awards would be incalculable ; but, apparently only those in close touch with fighting troops, great soldiers like Napoléon, and students of human nature, really realize this fact.

At about the same time, and in view of an approaching *Honours Gazette*, I was told to forward the names of officers and others recommended for distinction ; and was given to understand that the Battalion, in common with the other Battalions in the Brigade, would be allotted *two* decorations.

So long as the distribution of decorations and awards remains as it is, so long will the issue cause dissatisfaction to the Regimental as opposed to the Staff Officers. The practice of allotting a certain number of decorations to Armies, Corps, Divisions, and Brigades will, whilst human nature is what it is, result in an entirely undue proportion of the number finding its way to Generals and staff, to the detriment of the fighting troops proper. Were this allotment left in the hands of the latter, they in turn would undoubtedly reverse the present system ! In whatever way the respective merits of Staff and Regimental Officers is argued, the fact remains that the rough work of war is the portion of the Regimental Officers, and that they and their men have the last word to say in victory and defeat. An Army Commander is credited with the remark that this war was won by the Company Commanders and the Second-Lieutenants. It is a remark fully borne out by the casualty lists, and should have been equally borne out by the honours lists.

If it be admitted (as it ought to be) that the fighting troops are equally deserving of recognition as are their directing staffs, then the personnel of both should share the honours proportionately. For instance, if it be decided to award two decorations to a Brigade Staff, which we will say consists of five officers, then the decorations allotted to Battalions,

Divisions, Corps, and Armies, should be in a similar proportion, i.e., two-fifths of their respective strengths in officers. The Brigade Staff should be the determining factor in all awards, because its personnel is necessarily both a fighting and a directing one. If it is contended that such a concession would make decorations cheap, then the only thing to be done is to reduce them all round, and fill up the gaps with "mentions in despatches."

Nothing of note occurred during this week; the enemy occasionally put some shells into the village, but only spasmodically and not in the way of a bombardment. It was my last week with the Battalion, Russell having said that I was in need of a complete change and rest; and I spent the 24th September in farewell visits to my friends. I was unable to find Cobbold in his retreat at Fosse 10, a substantial village, with very wide streets. His warriors, whom I met, only replied, "I couldn't say" to Hart's and my enquiries as to the position of their Headquarters. This expression has been in vogue in the Army as long as I can remember. "Age cannot wither" it, but only makes it the more aggravating. I then made my adieux to Count Gleichen, Vincent, and des Voeux (C.R.E.), who were conferring at Brigade Headquarters, and to Robinson, Stourton, and the Brigade Staff. At my own Headquarters several officers had forgathered to bid me good-bye.

On the morning of the 25th September a Divisional car called for me, and I departed from the scene of active hostilities, the last I saw of my fine Battalion being the erect figure of a Headquarter orderly standing at the salute, his martial appearance greatly heightened by his steel helmet, which bore my crest emblazoned on its front!

At Barlin (Divisional Headquarters) I picked up Paris (G.S.O. 3) and together we careered madly (there is no speed limit in France) to Boulogne, which we reached just in time to see the packet-boat leaving the harbour. There was no other boat till the following day, which was really fortunate—for me, not for Paris, who was on short leave—as I put up at the Hotel Meurice, and was able to meet Rooke and Beyts, who arrived later from England. Rooke



and Redesdale (A.D.C. to Count Gleichen) took our car on its return journey to the 37th Division.

Under Rooke's able leadership the Battalion took part in the bitter fighting that centred round the assault and capture of Beaumont Hamel in November of that year. Here Thain, then Adjutant, was again wounded, and the gallant Boucher, after a series of conspicuous acts of bravery, was killed. Regimental Sergeant-Major Shear and many other good N.C.O.'s and men also fell in these operations. The Battalion was again engaged in the important operations about Arras that commenced on Easter Monday, 1917, where it lost its Commanding Officer, F. S. N. Savage-Armstrong\*, and in the fierce struggle in Flanders that ended in the seizure of the Passchendaele Ridge.

In that year (1917) consequent upon the reduction in strength of Brigades, from four to three Battalions, the 11th Royal Warwickshire, in common with many others, was broken up, half the Battalion being merged in one of the line Battalions and the other half in the 10th (Service) Battalion.

In its short but gallant career it had fully maintained, and added to, the glorious traditions of the old 6th Foot. My service with the Battalion was my first experience of a Midland Regiment, though I had previously served with both northern and southern ones. It leaves on my mind the impression of a stern and dogged bearing in the face of danger, of steadfastness to duty, and of a calm courage in adversity that represents all that is best in the English nation.

Writing to me in October, 1917, its old Divisional Commander, who had followed its fortunes from the time when it paraded before him, 1,000 strong, dressed in blue clothes, and armed with only 100 rifles, till it emerged broken but unshaken from the bloody turmoil of the Somme (July-November, 1916), said : " I always had the greatest admiration for the Battalion under your Command, and for the excellent work it did."

\*Colonel Rooke had been invalided to England before this date, and had joined me at Chatham, prior to his appointment to command a School of Instruction for the training of officers of the Air Force.

## APPENDIX.

(Secret.)

### RELIEF ORDERS.

By Lieut.-Colonel C. S. Collison, Commanding 11th (Service) Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment.

1.—The Battalion will be relieved by the 13th Battalion Royal Fusiliers to-morrow.

#### 2.—ROUTES.

- (a) The 13th Royal Fusiliers will use the BIENVILLERS-HANNESCAMPS Road.
- (b) "A" Company, in its retirement, will move across country by a route which will be pointed out to Officer Commanding that Company to-morrow at 10 a.m.
- (c) "B" and "C" Companies will use the BIENVILLERS-HANNESCAMPS Road.
- (d) "D" Company will retire under arrangements to be made by the Officer Commanding the Company.
- (e) The route thence to ST. AMAND will be via POMMIER.

#### 3.—ORDER OF RELIEF.

- (a) The Company of the 13th Royal Fusiliers to be billeted in CHISWICK AVENUE, and the vicinity, will arrive at HANNESCAMPS at 5-45 p.m. in relief of "A" Company; other Companies of the 13th Royal Fusiliers will arrive at HANNESCAMPS at 10 minute intervals in the following order :\*
- (b) The Company to be billeted in BERLIN STREET and vicinity.
- (c) The two Platoons to relieve the LEFT ("C") Company.

- (d) The two Platoons to relieve the RIGHT ("B") Company.
- (e) The two Platoons resting in SUPPORT of the LEFT Company.
- (f) The two Platoons resting in SUPPORT of the RIGHT Company.

#### 4.—COMMUNICATION TRENCHES.†

LONDON ROAD, LULU LANE, and LIVERPOOL STREET are available for use in the relief.

#### 5.—GUM BOOTS.‡

- (a) The two Platoons to relieve the RIGHT Company will obtain their boots at the *entrance* to LULU LANE, where the latter meets the new partially-completed communication trench.
- (b) The two Platoons to relieve the LEFT Company, by the BARRIER, about 200-yds. N.E. of PICCADILLY CIRCUS.
- (c) The boots will be tied together in pairs, and handed to N.C.O.'s and men of the Relieving Platoons as they pass. The condition of the communication trenches is good, and the boots should be carried up by hand and not put on at the time of issue.
- (d) The Platoon Commanders of the Resting Platoons "B" and "C" Companies must arrange that the Gum-boots are properly tied together IN PAIRS, and will detail an N.C.O. and one man to hand them to the Relieving Platoons of the 13th Royal Fusiliers as the latter pass their dumps (and see 5(a) and (b) above).
- (e) The Platoons of "B" and "C" Companies in the fire-trenches will similarly tie their gum-boots together in pairs, will carry them from the trenches by hand, and place them in two separate heaps, near the shelters at the W. entrance to LULU LANE.
- (f) Care must be taken that the boots are handed over clean and dry inside.

**6.—BAGGAGE.**

Officers' baggage will be piled at PICCADILLY CIRCUS by 5-30 p.m.

Mess Boxes and Company Stores will be piled by the Water Butts, E. of PICCADILLY CIRCUS, by the same hour.

**7.—TRANSPORT.**

The Transport is to be clear of HANNESCAMPS by 7 p.m.

**8.—DISCIPLINE.**

(a) Orders as to smoking and noise are as heretofore and must be strictly adhered to. No smoking will be permitted till the CHURCH at BIENVILLERS is passed.

(b) Strict march-discipline must be maintained. All unit-Commanders must be in rear of their Commands.

(c) Details, such as Officers' Servants, Orderlies, etc., must not be in groups of less than eight, and must be under an N.C.O. Parties of less strength are strictly forbidden.

**9.—BILLETING PARTIES.**

Major T. H. Lloyd and Lieut. S. W. G. Chambers, with one N.C.O. and one man per Company and one N.C.O. and one man from the Machine Gun Detachment, will leave HANNESCAMPS at 9-15 a.m. arriving at ST. AMAND at 11 a.m. Lieut. Chambers will march this party to ST. AMAND.

**10.—MEDICAL AID-POST.**

The Aid-Post will be relieved at 5 p.m.

**11.—SIGNALS.**

The Signal Stations will be taken over by the Signallers of the 13th Royal Fusiliers by 2-30 p.m.

Sergt. Yeomans will send a party to ST. AMAND to take over the Signal Station there by the same hour.

12.—**GUARDS.**

The Guards of the 13th Royal Fusiliers will relieve our Guards at 2 p.m.

13.—**INTERVALS ON THE MARCH.**

An interval of at least 200 yards will be maintained between Platoons until BIENVILLERS is cleared.§

14.—**TRENCH STORES.**

Representatives of the Relieving Battalion will take over trench stores at Companies' and Battalion Headquarters at 2-30 p.m. The necessary certificates must be completed and signed.

15.—**MACHINE GUNS.**

The Machine Guns will be relieved under arrangements made by the Brigade Machine Gun Officer.

16.—**BILLETS.**

The usual certificates as to the cleanliness of billets will be sent to the Adjutant half an hour before the dug-outs or shelters are vacated.

(Signed) J. FALVEY-BEYTS, *Captain,*  
*Adjutant, 11th (S) Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment.*

24th January, 1916.

NOTES.

\*The relieving unit invariably conformed to the routes and arrangements made by the out-going unit.

†It was necessary to mention communication trenches that were passable. In winter they often became impassable.

‡Thigh gum-boots had recently been issued.

§In order to minimize the effect of hostile shell-fire.

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